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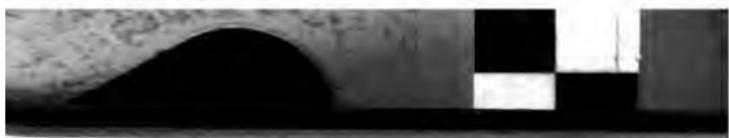
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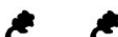


JIMINY





J I M I N Y
AND HER LOST SON-
NETS * * * WITH
SOME FEW SHORT
EXAMPLES, OCCA-
SIONALLY SUIT-
ABLE, FROM
HER OWN
POETIC
WORKS





J I M I N Y

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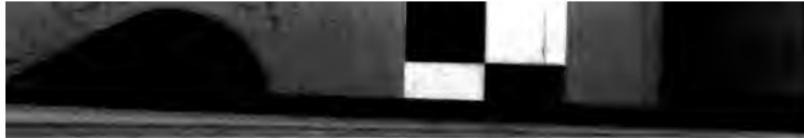
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CHAPTER ONE



Smile with me
And you shall see
Smiling things
And happy be:
Bright blue skies
And children's eyes,
Swallows' wings
And budding tree.

—From the *Little Rhymes*, etc., of
JENNIE RAFTERY RENI.



CHAPTER ONE

1

COME now, you would not make a fairy story of it, would you? And yet . . .

Well, then, something merely most romantic. Not entirely believable, of course; but what love story ever is that, unless it be your own? What, besides, if it is sheerest gossamer? You shall see the light through it just that much more readily.

Let it be a tale, then, of no vast heroics. It could not be so. Benjamin Benvenuto Reni was already on the meek verge of marriage. And Jiminy Reni (born Jennie Raftery) was rather the one of these two who showed the heroism, when she insisted upon marrying Benjamin Benvenuto before he was even out of khaki or back at his task of making decorated borders for the pictures in a daily paper.



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She had been a teacher of English in an East Side public school where English is more the language of state than of commerce. She had taught it with a pretty little brogue, begot over the kitchen table in her home. But she had taught it lovingly, and with a rapture for the major poets which transfused every explanation she must make of personal pronouns, prepositions and conjunctives. When she had announced her resignation to the school's principal, that lady so long unmarried for reasons known to all the world except herself had told her what a fool she was to toss Tennyson into a stew-pan, and that Browning would never stand up before a baking-oven. At home, too, they had made an all too rapid calculation for her, to prove her unmindful of salaries and such.

But the geraniums on the fire escape were blooming to an early summer, and the next day would bring to its North River dock the transport carrying Benjamin Benvenuto home from the campaign in Italy in which a few Americans were given to share. So Miss Jennie Raftery, lover of Browning and author of no less a volume than the "Little Rhymes for Little Readers," packed her wicker suitcase with closed ears and quickened pulse, and left her father's (and four hundred

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other persons') roof at dawn, to wait beside the ropes of the gray dock for the landing of Hospital Sergeant Benjamin Benvenuto Reni.

Hold now, good reader. Here's no war story. Only a short prologue mixed into the dusty business of demobilization.

She still looked the little school teacher, you would have said—had you not been too busy staring at the pier's black mouth for some boy of your own. But how were you to know that she had committed the one great act of self-liberation: had taken the long gold chain, which is her craft's infallible badge, and thrust it down inside her shirt-waist? Or that the catch of it was jammed close to hold folded a letter which thus lay hidden and secure against her heart? It was the last that he had written before sailing; and in it was a plea, a promise, an honest pact, a flinging open of the door upon a wholly new life.

That is why her lip trembled and her eyes fogged a little when the column, reforming on the pier, went past the crowd without a halt. Somewhere towards the center of it Sergeant Reni, guiding his minor command, barked loudly at the heels of a lagging squad when he saw her, and, though his very soul leaped to the glad sight of her, went on calling out the cadence of the



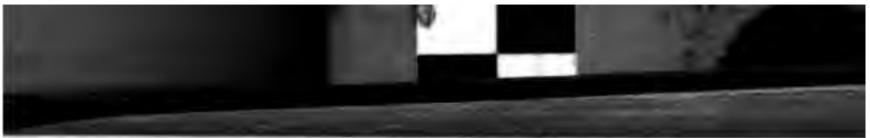
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step in a voice made prouder and important by the moment. Manlike, he thought she would want most to see him at his manly duties. But she stood watching the back of his high head until succeeding columns screened it from her, and the olive drab serpentine was around the corner, up a side street, gone towards some nearby cantonment. She knew from the papers which one it would be, and hurried there by subway, train, and then afoot among the barracks, where the wind blew coldly over a treeless camp.

2

Along the scarred asphalt of those army streets she searched for most of the remaining day. Some one with the air of a major general doing kitchen police incognito took pity on her indirection, and sent her up a sandy hill to such a place as Headquarters. Here, in a closet that reeked of cigarette smoke, she stood for some two hours, waiting until one of the bald little lieutenants in the sanctum should cease sucking his toothpick and come out to give her a decent orientation and some hint of between what boxes of barracks her Hospital Sergeant Reni might be tucked away.

There was yet a while before she found him.



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But she came upon him unexpectedly at last, at the end of an alley of hard brown dirt. He was in his army undershirt, having just come from putting his head and whole upper self once more under the hilarious profusion of an American faucet; and even before she could cry out to him she trembled to a momentary sight of brown biceps, which, damply gleaming, whipped out of his short yellow sleeves. Even, too, before she could halt, he had seen her and had her up, quite an inch off the dust and into his tightening arms, crying out something unintelligible, deeply foolish, which hushed against her flaming cheek. To Jennie Raftery, learning in tired bliss that there is no kiss like a sudden one, it was worth the day of doubts and wandering, the year of stubborn waiting. Worth a lifetime made impractical in the moonlight of the major poets.

But then, as hastily, he grew shy again, and fell to saluting a young cockerel of a billeting officer, to clicking his heels and yapping at whatever luckless private crossed the company street with hands in pockets or heels low. The large, vehement eye of him grew more troubled and his talk more short—until he straightway made a dash into the barracks and returned in his O. D. blouse.



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"There," he said, "now I feel more decent, Jiminy."

Which was all that was the trouble. And Jennie Raftery had learned another lesson in the ways of men.

He led her to some supply room steps, and sat beside her in their tracked dust. Men clattered up and down; behind them the door was continually creaking and slamming, shoes scraping, the wares of war clanking into heaps guarded and counted in loud sing-song by a group of Ordnance men. The time for "turning in equipment" awakens a fierce, noisy joy in the most hardened warriors. In front of the opposite barracks some old Polish mother listened with a wet, working face to the incidents her son was telling. Above them, in the sleeping quarters, a mouth harmonica breathed asthmatically of its "Home Sweet Home." Down the area a squad, by divine right of bunkies, was pummeling one of its members.

"Jiminy, Jiminy!" was all that Sergeant Reni could find to say. Neither time nor place deterred him: only the knowledge that both of them had whole new Decamerons to tell, and that each tale climbed to this quick, cluttered climax of re-meeting. So for a short while they were content with her utter silence and his constant repetition

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of the name which, from long, gentle usage, had taken on a meaning subtle and accredited:

"Jiminy, Jiminy" . . . until, at one point, the measure of his joy outburst the dam of doubts and cautions he had for a whole voyage been building, and poured down into voluble, unprisoned chatter. "I don't care," he cried, "what things stand in our way! There's more man than artist in me now, Jiminy," and, growing pleasurable grim, watched the light of adoration widen her blue eyes. "Nobody can part us now!"

She sat up a little straighter. "But nobody wants to, dear," she said. "We are going to be married—" she smiled but would not falter—"When? To-morrow?"

The invisible dam of discretion reared up again across the Reni vision. "Your folks?" he said hoarsely.

"I've said good-by to them. I could do nothing else. Perhaps in a year or two—"

"The public school?"

"I have the farewell blessings of Miss Higlesby. And little Reba Moisewitch weeps at her little desk to-day for a lost teacher. But some young substitute is already consoling her. The old order runs on—without me. I shall never again push chalk."

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There was finality enough in that. "Forgive me, Jiminy," he said, "for all these fears of mine—"

"It was the right time for you to have them," she answered. "You have been brave enough through a whole war. It's only on the way home that you began to fear a thousand things."

"How did you know that?" he wondered, unwillingly.

The major poets had given her wisdom. "A man begins to worry," she said, "when he knows that he is loved. A woman when she thinks that she isn't."

It went quite unappreciated. "Yes," he confessed with fearful earnestness, "there were all of a thousand things to think of. I haven't my old job back. I—I don't know that I even want it."

It was Jiminy's two hands which went around his large, slim, roughened one, this time. "Of course you don't, dear. I am glad of it, no matter what it means."

"It means," cried Benjamin, "that what I want the most in all the world is you. It's the things I want next that stand so high across the path. I want to learn to paint like Raphael!"

No Madonna of that prince of painters wears

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a smile more heavenly than that which brushed the lips of Jennie Raftery. "And I," she answered him, "I dream of writing poetry to equal Browning's. So if we dream apace, it won't matter so much if the kettle boils over or the cake box rumbles with famine. Besides," she added briskly, "my 'Little Rhymes' paid a semi-annual royalty last week."

She gave him no chance to denounce her. "You needn't tell me the nine hundred and ninety-nine other worries," she went on. "I know them and have thought them out for you—or with you, even though we were at ocean's ends."

No idle boast. When youth thinks at all it thinks in brave proportions. And Jiminy had placed upon her list a universe of things which never would be missed. One by one, in all this clank of side-arms, and while the harmonica breathed on of a "rose that bloomed in No Man's Land," she told them off to him. She made him hear them to an end, smiling hard through it all to mask a joy and eagerness which should have run to tears.

She confessed to a trousseau of one heaven-blue shirtwaist and a pair of silk stockings. All his civilian clothes had gone, at the war's beginning, to furnish patches for little Belgian babies—

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in there, they'd be a threadbare pair between them. But a decently mended one, she promised, with an eye upon a button which clung to his blouse only because, by the ancient trick of soldiery, a match-stick held it there.

She knew, she said, that he was spelling the *Prairie* now with a larger F than ever went into a Primary primer. That the war had sickened him of routine and realities; that he would want *now* if ever to hitch to a star and hoist himself to realms creative; that he dreaded returning to that wooden slab in the newspaper office where there were only photographs to retouch or frames of black gew-gaws to construct, each time of press approaching. She would keep him from that, never let him go back. She was going to send him, she'd decided, to an art school. Would help him somehow; would not leave it all to love to find a way. Dreaming together, they might emerge together from the dust. Have a home, anyhow; a sort of battery, even if only a toy one, where the zest for living, working, loving would daily be recharged; where faith in each other would mount to faith in themselves; where from the surging of their common hopes this dream would rise, Venus-born, to some swift, white accomplishment. . . .

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3

But then, at some such phrase, the divinity passed out of Jennie's utterances, and the goddess gave way to a shy, hard breathing little school-mistress. She thought she could not go on, for all the kindling of his eyes; but she dared not let him make her any answer now, and so in a simpler, broken fashion she continued:

"Never mind all that, dear. I know what you want most of all, just now. A vacation! Two weeks of nothing at all to do!"

He laughed like a boy found out. "Well, maybe. Just a little spell of loafing. I had hoped for it, anyhow."

"You shall have it. And so shall I. It isn't altogether a cynic who claims that the way to love lies through idleness. Listen"—for the bugle on Headquarters Hill was blowing the first call for retreat, and the time for visitors had ended—"there's a mountain pasture which overlooks a green and white little village of Nazareth, New Hampshire. In that pasture, hidden in high grass, there stands a tiny little bungalow—a wee, weather-browned thing of rafters, hearth stone and an attic ladder. Last year three of us from

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the school hired it for a month. It belongs to me now, for the next two weeks commencing tomorrow. Spring hasn't left yet, up there, and the tops of the mountains are still under snow. But the rest of the big world that rolls away from the porch is blossoming and green. Last year when I was there, I was always longing . . ."

"Nazareth, New Hampshire," repeated Sergeant Reni in a memorizing manner, and stood up to salute as if he were receiving strictest orders. The dapper young billeting officer, still strutting in the offing, returned the salutation by mistake and thought him the politest sergeant in the camp. They both laughed a little too easily at that.

Then, in the grace of infinite understanding, Jiminy rose too and went down the hard street between rows of barracks, threading past lines of companies forming there for the evening honors to the flag. The dusk took her completely; Benjamin Benvenuto ceased to search after her, and turning, bawled his own men into line.

In the yellow wakefulness of a day coach she traveled all that night. Sometimes, when not too sleepy, she would open the sesame of a new cook book. But again, when the chill of dozing woke her to a scream of brakes and switching, she was grateful to commend her soul to Browning.

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A best beloved volume from her set of him had
not failed to leave home with her.

Judge her neither fool nor heroine thereby.
Merely a poetess reconsecrated: a Sappho in one-
syllables, with Phaon in khaki soon to strain at
her white, ascending heels.

Yet by that thumb-glossed volume of the mas-
ter's verses hangs the whole tale which "Robert
Browning, writer of plays," might possibly have
found a plot to his hand . . . and for which, in
a modest manner, this preamble was prepared.
Let it end with the dawn, and Jiminy Raftery
coming through its fires into Nazareth.



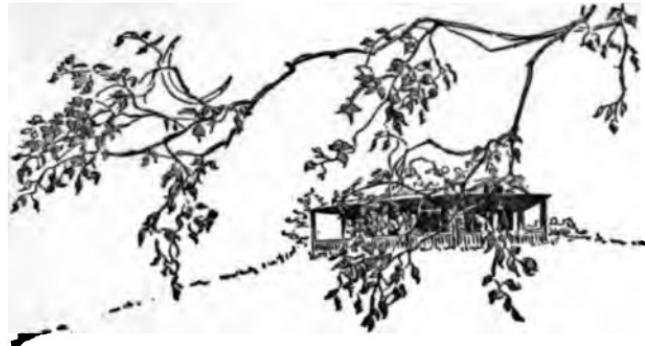


CHAPTER TWO



I had a little cardboard house
(I built it in my childhood,
With painted vines and columbines
To make its walls a wildwood).
And there I hid each secret wish,
When once I learned to charm it,
So that the rain might pelt in vain,
Nor ever a wind could harm it.

—From the *Little Rhymes, etc., of*
JENNIE RAFTERY RENI.



CHAPTER TWO

1

WONDERING what manner of man was Daniel Arimondo became a chief delight to them. The little bungalow had nooks and trappings which proposed a quaint and noble soul. Such happiness they found there, they seemed to be having it by direct benefit of this bookseller whom they did not even know by sight. Jiminy, forwarding a money order for their two weeks' housing, inclosed some lines of timid ecstasy. They had thoughts, these days, for neither friend nor enemy; yet when Adam delved and Eve span, Eden could not have been debated with more wonder.

"He's an oldish fellow," decided Benjamin Benvenuto, "and there's the wrinkled sadness of



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an Albrecht Durer to his face. A tall, white forehead just a little dappled with dust from his bookshelves. The Roman of his nose and the humor of his lips are both beginning to droop with bookish age, but in his eyes a contemplation. . . . Here, I'll show you him to the life . . . here, in these Rimmer plates I brought along."

Jiminy went on dusting an old spinet in the corner. She was not conjuring in terms of art, nor needed charts to guide her. She paused to look out of the windows which gave golden glimpses of the mountains; then let her eyes go back to the more brownly gold of the unpainted planking of their walls, and to some old Holland plates that hung there. In corner shelves, too, some willow-ware, undaunted by a million imitations, raised its blue patternings like early flowers of a woodland.

"He's one of those dearest of old men," she pronounced, relifting the theme from the depths of feminine intuition. "Under his gray, tousled locks he thinks each minute of some whimsical but beautiful thing. He's still a little boy at heart." She pointed out a disused beartrap rusting on its iron chain against one wall, the scabbard of a hunting-knife slung close thereby; above



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it the bent black finger of a scythe. "In his youth," she was sure, "he was adventurous and wild." Bits of the burning rags of "Pioneers, O Pioneers" tore across her memory. Possibly he was a hoary image of Walt Whitman, too. . . . Then, again, he might have been a sailor in the days before he dwindled down to books; there was an African tomtom over one door, here and there a Chinese piece. In hectic barbarity a Peruvian pot glared against the bricks of the fireplace. But next to it the heads of seven monks kept a jovial, silent secret. They seemed to know, these little plaster fellows. Where flesh and blood could only work itself into a hundred grimaces of guessing, they smiled on in a full and monkish knowledge.

Here was no monastic spirit, though, upon this little hearth. For, in the midst of their conjecturing, let it be told how Benjamin Benvenuto arose from the ancient red and black chair wherein he had been rocking to his pipe and thoughts, and came to put a jealous arm about his wife's young waist.

"To the winds," he declaimed, "with Daniel Arimondo and his unknown sort! What twist of mind must always be inviting his intrusion?"



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"The artistic instinct," said Jiminy, her soul in obeisance.

"The literary curse," said Benjamin, his arm the closer.

Jiminy glanced down, let her eyes gloat upon the gold stripes of his sleeve, tarnishing all too quickly. But higher along his arm there had only lately been affixed the red stripe of an honorable discharge; and the world at large, and young wives in particular, will forgive her for being proudest of all for this one. No wonder they had chosen so hilarious a scarlet for the color of this badge of the homecoming, chevron of happiness.

2

That was strangely the first thing she saw of him, two afternoons ago, when he had got down clumsily from out of a hired rig and come clumping in his army shoes around the house and on to the porch. Jiminy, there in the center of the living room, could not answer for her trembling, and through the windows heard him move away from the little brass knocker in a momentary perplexity. Then she caught the zig-zag flash of that red stripe upon his arm and bounded to the door

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and flung it wide. There had been the clatter of a paintbox and portfolio falling as she usurped their places in his arms; and the rattle of the hired rig returning down the village died away to a murmur as of a burning and receding bridge.

It was she who had succeeded at last in some casual questions. By what train was he come? How had he found the bungalow so readily? Was it not wholly as he dreamed it?

Then, before all else, he must make the tour of their few rooms with her; must climb the ladder with her into a gray and reverential bit of garret; come down again into the tinny mysteries of a small kitchen and be shown the altar whereat he should wash the daily dishes and proclaim his love in suds. Then back into the living room where the big brick fireplace reared up in tiers of solid hospitality, and curtains of a red to match his stripe stained the sunlight into joyful softness on the golden walls.

Then a door to the side, and Jiminy had hesitated but a moment before she opened it. But neither of them, standing in sweet calm, went therein; only gazed with clasped hands at the white linens and the spread upon the broad, grandmotherly old bed; and saw how, just beyond one of the windows, a pair of birds had



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built their nest under the porch eaves; and how, across the top of an old chest of drawers, the distant mountains seemed to bend close down and pour their blueness, through window and all, to the very bedside. Somehow their hands had loosed, and Benjamin Benvenuto, feeling his eyes grown hungry and a heat upon his cheek, turned away, and looked back to Jiminy. But she had fled.

There was early supper laid upon a table of the porch, whence the hills dissolved to purple as they met the lowering sun, and intervening fields gave up their brightness to the dusk. Blackbirds, full of a day of plundering, rose with sleek flapping into the unseen branches of their robber nests. A humming-bird, its wings small, singing puffs of action, stopped in for a last snatch at the vine of hyacinth beans which flanked the doorway. While the great union of songsters tucked up its bills in feathered wings and dozed to silence, the instrumentalists of the insect world took up the springtide canticle in shrill, persistent measure.

Then, because the laws of the land for which he had fought demanded it, these two had set forth down the hill towards the winking lights of other homes, in search of the business of mar-



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riage. The village was hushed, its houses uplifting their white pillars to the dark capture of oncoming night. A lone horse, at a hitching post, turned his head as they went by and followed them with a complaining whinny for the comforts of his stall. A belated automobile, bumping down one hill in a blaze of light, then up another with a bobbing wink of red to its rear, throttled off towards some immense hotel in the highlands of fashion.

A dim and smoky irradiance from the back of the general store told them they might stop awhile to buy provisions for to-morrow. A sniffling, sleepy youngster sold them what their fancy listed; even (when he saw the color and the many of the ex-Sergeant's stripes) a pound of sugar. It was a priceless thing to ask of him—and get—in those days. Then they had gone forth again in search, little guessing what a perfume of romance they left behind in that dark place of cans and crates and fly-specked counters; or that the freckled youth, polishing an imaginary Croix du Guerre of his own, was staring after them with the passionate pride of one who would suffer scowls and scoldings for their sake, when the all-scarcity of sugar were discovered.



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A toothless and benign old judge laid down his weekly paper when they found him, shaking his head at the irregularity of it all, and stirring hard into a cup of ebony coffee. On the shade of his reading lamp morning glories were clutched with painted immortality into the horrific embrace of the leaf of, say, the *Washingtonia Robusta*. Sipping his coffee and staring hard into this lighted jungle, he heard them through and murmured, between sips, "Youth, youth!"

It was the uniform, perhaps, which won him also to their story; more likely, it was the sugar which Jiminy, already a housewife, saw by his soured lips his coffee needed. The pinch of sweetness ran down into his old veins; he sighed at the utter shamelessness of the morning glory and the palm leaf, went to his eyeglasses and desk, and scratched with dates upon official papers.

Witnesses issued forth: a mother all rotund from out the rearward portion of the house, a son with upright odors of the stable in his overalls. The black lily of an ancient phonograph gushed forth the wedding march for them. The rag rug under their feet glimmered to spread them a carpeting of colors. The law of the land spoke on for them through pink and kindly gums. Over



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its shoulder a window gave them a rising moon, and of a night which swooned with spring. And so they were married. And upon the globe of earth another spreading leaf, another flower of fairness had been painted into deathless union.

The rotund mother, weeping through it all—as if she owed them it, with Jiminy's own mother far away in tight lipped silence—wept the more when they presented her with all of their pound of sugar. She had not been able to buy any for days and days . . . and how in the world . . .

"Youth, youth!" explained the judge on their behalf, in quite a wistful tone this time, and transferred still another pinch into his cooling coffee.

Out again, then, under the new-found stars, and with the moon to swathe them and their homeward passage in a holy finery. Birches stood forth to them along their way in swaying white virginity; old elms pronounced their benediction with tall arms upholding to the silver godhead; as the road climbed higher into light they had the wan glory of the valley beneath them, wraiths of a night mist tumbling in its grass, and distant mountains rising into heaped confusion with the clouds to meet the moon and know her nakedness.



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3

The fire they had built upon the hearth met them through the windows as they came. They lingered yet awhile before the ruddy brick and cheer of it, hearing with tongue-tied happiness what epithalamium some earliest cricket of the year could sing. Sauntering clumsily, gazing everywhere but at each other, they found new things to cry aloud within the glowing radius.

"Look, look! An omen!" exclaimed Benjamin Benvenuto, pressing close to devour some old and yellowed engraving. Jiminy, taken by his words, brought up beside him at the fireplace, so that they gazed together into a small, ancient frame, hanging high upon the brick face of the chimney.

"Raphael," pronounced Benjamin. "It is the Donna Velata of Raphael. The Fornarina."

In trembling tones he told her of it. He had seen it years ago, when his father was still alive and had taken him abroad. They had gone especially to the Pitti to look for it. Last year he had hoped for a second glimpse, but there had been no Florentine holidays. He would have risked the perils of courts-martial to steal off to the Uffizi or the Pitti, to stand and worship



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again in the sight of the Madonnas there, the Popes, the famous frescoes. . . . But here, of them all, in this mountain corner where the orange tree gave way to frosty birch, the exquisiteness and grace of the Donna Velata breathing out above their very hearth. . . . Was there ever such omen for a marriage night!

To counterpart it, Jiminy must run for her beloved Browning, whirling the pages back and forth to find the postscript, "One Word More," wherein the poet dedicated all his "Men and Women" to his wife. And there she found it, a remembered passage, many times reread and pondered over; and read it now aloud for a husband's hearing:

"Raphael made a century of sonnets,
Made and wrote them in a certain volume
Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil
Else he only used to draw Madonnas;
These the world might view—but one, the volume.
Who that one, you ask? Your heart instructs you . . .

You and I will never read that volume.
Guido Reni, like his own eye's apple
Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
Cried, and the world cried too, 'Ours, the treasure!'
Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished."

Olympians, both of them, in the splendid fire of that moment; so that the little cricket, con-



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scious that he sang at no mere homely blaze, grew abashed and silent. It may have little meaning (and certainly the artist and the poetess paid no attention to it) but, while the cricket's treble merriment was stilled, some bullfrog in a distant pond took up the song of life and sang it through for them. He sang the shedding of his winter things, but there was something ominous, foreboding to the bass of it, just the same.

"I wonder," said Benjamin, as the flames went low, "I wonder . . ."

"I wish," breathed Jiminy, her eyes on their red heart, "I wish we could . . ."

Yet neither of them was brave enough to finish out the fantasy. "I suppose," she added meekly, "it is the literary curse."

"No," he corrected her, "the artistic instinct. And perhaps . . . after all . . ."

Yet Jiminy's courage brought the sentence to a close. "Perhaps," said she, "they aren't really lost forever."

But that closed the topic, too, for then they fell to laughter; and in laughter looked upon each other bravely at last, giving each other all their eyes' desire and delight. And the cricket, hearing this returning clarion, took up his song again to



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welcome them back from realms which he, in his homeloving little way, could scarcely guess of.

As he took the book from her, Benjamin Benvenuto saw for a first time how Jiminy was clad in a shirt-waist of heavenly blue; and when she saw his eyes upon it she was quick to tuck her feet up under her.

So went the major poet to a shelf. And as for those who lived and loved, they followed in the way of lovers ages old, and that night read no more.

Only, in the fire's heart, the cricket sang the night away to a deserted room.



CHAPTER THREE



Where the rainbow pours its bold
Colors to the promised earth,
You shall find no crock of gold—
Only this: the glowing birth
Of some newer rainbow, fleeing
Past the realms of all your seeing!

—From the *Little Rhymes*, etc., of
JENNIE RAFTERY RENI.



CHAPTER THREE

1

THREE was a miller's daughter . . .

It belonged to Benjamin Benvenuto, on that same hearth another night, to tell the story as he could remember it from books, the chatter of Italian streets and his own father's telling.

Donna Velata, from her shrine of brick, looked down upon them with an immobility sublime. What though the tale was hers? It was her present part in it only to stare grayly out from under a time-yellowed veil—a thing of acids, steel, and some hack's copying—one of a welter of commonplaces achieved by tying masterpieces to a printing press. In this poor, beggarly engraved form she seemed no more than a forlorn, derided ghost of that sweet body Raphael cele-



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brated. Yet in the eyes, perhaps, a lambent mystery not altogether lost, and over all the perfect face a pride, a light which even now burned dimly down some aisle of secret history.

They looked up to her often, these lovers, as the little they knew of her story unfolded. Benjamin could tell of Raphael's love for her, a miller's daughter—or a baker's, if you would tamp it down to prose; of how for her sake he forewent marriage with the niece of a cardinal and let that daughter of the highborn die complaining of a broken heart; how he, Rome's favorite, Italy's idol, his brush a glowing sceptre to command all Europe's renaissance, fifty princely pupils always faithful at his back, would suddenly dismiss the lot of them as so much chaff, retrace his steps alone and come, a tired, yearning youth, into the benison of Margarita's beauty . . . Margarita, daughter of Francesco Luti, little baker from Sienna.

How, too, she was content to be the blue and quiet pool beneath a gleaming monument, happy enough if only a single hour gave a white flicker of his reflection to her face. How her beauty served him in his most famous works, so that the Mother of God shines forth through her features to-day on the holiest shrines of nations. Then



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how, when the day's light faded and the painter must lay down his flagging brush and cry this beauty scattered with the dusk, she had love's power to call it back anew into a lover's quickened arms, her eyes deep flagons for his courage, his supremacy.

How, too, the story goes that Raphael, prince of courtiers, dictator to cardinals, fell into the way of schoolboys, scribbling ardent sonnets on the margins of his sketches. Perhaps in gloating secret he had copied them thereafter into some golden book . . . some such a one as they had read of in Browning's dedication to his wife. Perhaps . . . and yet again (for facts so oft revive where myths sink breathless down) these sonnets were not altogether lost, but waited somewhere, in some hidden burial, for their chance finding. There was a legend in Italy that only a lover should find them; a legend full, besides, of dreadful threats, imperious superstitions mounting guard against the search which either man or woman should dare. All Italy had shrugged and turned away, by now forgetting the far possibility.

But not so, Jennie Raftery Reni. For, while her husband took to poking heavily at the fire as if in payment for his inability to finish out the



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tale, she sought the supplement and refuge of those Browning stanzas, reading them through as if the spaces between lines must yield the secret. There was naught there: only a poet musing in patrician calm behind a barricade of print. Her eyes went upwards a last time to grope with the dark eyes of the fair Fornarina; but out of the flat grays of her engraving Raphael's beloved had no gleam to give. Her story told, she seemed to have faded back into the stateliness of the Velatian lady and, with her hand upon a quiet bosom, gazed down from heights ineffable.

"I'd rather know one half the past," said Jiminy, "than all the world's future." Then she repented, adding: "Is that so much to ask?"

"I told you all I know," her husband pleaded. "When we're back in the city there'll be books and people of all sorts to tell us more."

They must content themselves with that. It was a hope far flung, however; not in the ordinary places should they have to seek and question. That is, if they were to seek at all. It seemed so heinous an affair to be staring jealously out of the iridescent walls of their contentment. Bubbles have a way of breaking in one's eyes; and theirs had been sailing so deliciously across a week of summer moons. They were so happy



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here, it reeked of treason to utter any other wish.

So argued Benjamin, when they had gone out upon the porch thereafter. But something doleful in his tone confessed that he berated his own heart; and when they faced the oceanic spell of light upon the hillsides his reluctant sermon sighed itself away.

"I know, I know," said Jiminy, taking the fault entirely for hers. But she could not forebear continuing to tell him what any sonnet means in any poet's casket; how like the single pearl upon the Fornarina's forehead it must glow with roundness, polish and completeness, the embers of some lovely thought couching in the shell of its few lines. And what a sonnet Raphael must have written!

Benjamin Benvenuto took it up at that point. He knew too well the splendid symmetry, undying colors, pageantry of fresco . . . and all these things transmuted into language!

Who ever could deny the power of words? Beethoven's heroic submission to them in the final movement of his Ninth Symphony was as nothing to this proof which Raphael gave of their tyranny over all other ways of self-expression (this, of course, was sponsored by Jennie, maker of little rhymes). When the last endeavor was at hand,



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both the painted picture and the orchestral surge had had to be caught up into a mesh of words. . . .

But Benjamin was contrary. "Not that so much," cried he. "But to the finder of those sonnets, if ever we——" then he gulped, and began anew: "If ever they are found they would light up the life and whole philosophy of the artist. Think what a guide . . . why, the secret of all his art might lie revealed in them for him who understands!"

"Yes," laughed Jiminy, "but written into poetry. And for a woman's reading."

But then the moonlight found their faces and betrayed them both. For both were dreaming greatly, from the separate windows of their arts and letters, of the same great love. . . . Raphael's for Margarita, daughter of the baker from Sienna. And on that trysting ground their longings met and stole together up a crazy lane whose end was not on earth.

"Those who found them," thought Benjamin, "would be the keepers of a love so beautifully blazing that all the world is glory in its light."

"A love," thought Jiminy, "so fragrant through the centuries, it must breathe life beyond life into the love of those who read the pages."



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"Come then," cried he, trembling a little—though probably only to the evening cool—"the task of finding is the task of lovers."

"It is your task and mine," his wife replied.

Lights of the village winked at them in solemn perturbation, broke the madcap spell, and left them all forlorn. For where in all the world might they commence? Or end?

They tried to picture, for comic relief, what the old judge down there would say, were they to step into his lamplit presence and ask him for a writ to search each nook and corner of this village, the next village, and the next and next, till every hut and mansion of the world were combed. Or what the freckled youth behind the counter of the general store would do if they were to inquire, had he not in stock the lost sweets of a famous painter's sonnets to his Donna.

Then suddenly, as they came back into the bungalow, lingering one last moment in the hearth's warm interlude, he clapped his thigh and laughed up into the rafters. At the very same moment Jiminy, her eyes upon the picturesque comforts of the room, had the same thought.

"Of course," cried both of them, "Daniel Ari-mondo!"



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2

The foolish forgetfulness of them! If ever a man could aid them—give them at any rate some slightest clew—it should be Daniel Arimondo, the bookseller, the host of this honeymoon!

Jiminy, particularly, knew it for a certain thing. This was the house that love built, sang she; and the man who put Holland plates upon the golden walls, monks on the chimney-piece and rusty beartraps over doors would surely have some whimsy of a hint for them.

And Benjamin, surer than ever of that Albrecht Durer face looking out in sadness over rows of dusty volumes, pointed in triumph to the Donna Velata's engraving, no longer so immeasurably above them.

"See," he said, "the dear old chap's evidently acquainted with the whole story. It'll touch his heart when we come into his little shop some afternoon and tell him. . . . Can't you imagine that shop, Jiminy? Tables of novels from ten and twenty years ago; poor gray remnants of authors never heard of nowadays. I'll bet he knows how to philosophize about them, too, in his quaint way! Stacks of old art plates on a table



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close to the sidewalk. I'll buy a couple of them with an air of connoisseurship, and you can have the Cornhill Magazine for 1870. . . . From that to Browning; from Browning to Raphael, and then, when his old doors are locked for the night, and he has beckoned us into some friendly chairs, he will tell us something . . . even if only a little, Jiminy . . . there among his whispering books. . . . Am I going too fast?"

Jiminy smiled back to his enthusiasm. "I can go faster," she said. "To-morrow or the next day will bring us a letter from Mr. Arimondo. He will surely answer the one in which I inclosed—in which I told him what we thought of all this, here." She tossed her head brightly towards the spinet and ruddy window curtains, patted the fireplace, and went on: "It will be a letter exactly of a piece with all this. Old fashioned yellow foolscap. Something a little shy, a little snuffy in its courtliness, to the tone of all he says; but we shall know from it how pleased he is, how glad we liked it so."

"Handwriting small, fine, making his letters very prettily, in spite of the shakiness of his hand," put in her husband.

"We shall hear from him!" she chanted.

"It will be only a good beginning."



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"To-morrow or the next day."

"And who shall guess the ending?"

It was enough for one night's dreaming. In the few days remaining to them here they fought the mood almost entirely away. They climbed the mountains near at hand; came to know Franconia's range by name and by the trails which tunneled under birch and pine to knolls of pleasant prospect; came up the Presidential's sheath of rock, into the clouds and out of them again to a bare, blowing solitude of heights. Benjamin Benvenuto, dashing new colors into the palette of his unslung paintbox, daubed away at hills and forests in a blithe frenzy of forgetfulness; and the wind at Jiminy's skirts, as she stood behind him and adored, stung her to merry wakefulness. Tired at last, the long day's sunshine finding a last place to linger in their eyes, they would come singing down the valley roads of evening, turn in across the fields and up the hill of home.

There was always a race, then, for the tin cylinder of a mail box, just outside the gate. But every evening they returned from its stubborn emptiness at quite a slower pace. Evidently Daniel Arimondo was a dawdler in the matter of his

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correspondence. Well, never mind. It was that way with all these fine old fellows!

More than that, there was an incense always stealing from the kitchen very soon thereafter which would waft away the darkest disappointment. Supper came and went, going the way of young wind-whetted appetites. Lingering over its finish, there on the twilit porch, the earth's clean smells would rise to them, and all the songs of big and little things that knew the summer—and they would reach to find each other's hand and heart, and be content.

Yet when indoors again, within the fire magic of the logs, there came to them at times some strange, unbidden echoes of that other longing. They would try not to talk of it . . . yet always drifted into failure, casting quick, covert glances at the engraving above. Days of immediate gladness melted off into this hearth-glow of a foolish reverie . . . foolish the more because they could not speak it out, but acted it apiece, and, in each other's eyes, loomed to the stature of Raphael himself . . . and of herself, the Margarita, beauteously beloved.



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3

Through the mists of their final morning they heard from Daniel Arimondo. There was a creak of the postman's buggy, coming to a stop before their gate; then a sharp:

"Whoa! Hey there!"

Jiminy slid away from the struggling cover of her suitcase, and was out upon the road before her husband guessed the business.

"Is your name Raftery?" asked the government.

"It was," said Jiminy, vaguely remembering that she had signed her letter to the bookseller in that modest manner, lest he should think some stranger had usurped her lease.

The government hesitated. "There's a letter here for a Miss Jennie Raftery." Then it realized and, blushing in the awful presence of a newly married woman, handed over the white envelope and chirped its mare onwards.

Jiminy the generous came straight into the house again and gave the unopened letter to her husband.

"It's come," said she. "But it's typewritten."

"Oh!" said Benjamin. He turned the envelope





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over with a sudden chill of expectations. In the upper corner of it he disliked the elegant embossing of "Daniel Arimondo, Dealer in Rare Books" which went on to give an address close upon Fifth Avenue.

But with a rich sense of dramatics, he climbed half way up the attic steps and tore the letter out and flung it open with a flourish, reading it aloud in a voice that went a gamut of oracularness:

"Miss Jennie Raftery,
Nazareth, New Hampshire.

"My dear Madam:

"This will acknowledge receipt of your money order in payment of two weeks' rental of my bungalow.

"In response to your inquiry would state that your present surroundings were furnished entirely by an ex-butler of mine who now runs an antique shop just off the Battery. I know nothing more of them.

"Yours very respectfully,
"D. ARIMONDO."

Benjamin Benvenuto thumped down the ladder again, and tore the letter into savage quarters.



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"He knows nothing——" gasped Jiminy.
"His ex-butler did it!"
"It isn't true! I know it isn't true!" Nevertheless she wept.



CHAPTER FOUR



Such things I write for boys and girls
As make their eyes to shine:

I wreath gay laughter round their curls—
And take their hearts to mine.
So can you blame me if, some time,
When I am weary and alone,
I dream that to my knees they climb,
Alive and warm—my very own?

—From the *Little Rhymes*, etc., of
JENNIE RAFTERY RENI.



CHAPTER FOUR

1

THERE were other newspapers, of course; but then there was THE newspaper. Even to Benjamin Benvenuto, who had left its staff, it continued to mean the one newspaper, the only.

Think, then, what it must have meant to Marechal Wimble. He had been in its employ, now, for seventeen or eighteen years, and it had been kindly towards his failings, patient with his successes, all that while. He had come to work for it straight from college, from the malpractice of some undergraduate magazine. He began his career as an ordinary reporter, but did not long remain one. ("Who's Who" would put it that way, possibly, if it contained his name—but it didn't.)



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He himself had a mild, deprecating way of telling it. Sent out for interviews, he would walk the streets in a cold frenzy, then steal back and report that the man was out. But when Greenwich Village invented one of its semi-annual centennials he handed in seven solid columns of exquisite descriptions of that old New York, and only sighed when one of the seven appeared. Once they sent him to an uneventful fire. He thrilled to the sight of flames and the din of engines, forgot to telephone and came back to write the story out himself, frenzied and smoky-eyed. When he had finished it, he knew that he had written a classic—but there was no one there to tell him so, for the last edition was already on the streets and the long line of editors dispersed towards home.

The next morning they had set him to correcting copy on the sporting page. He passed his pencil through an account of how, at the opening of the Polo Grounds, "Mayor Gaynor spoke a spooch." Somebody told him that maybe it wasn't the King's English, but that baseball news was not prepared for royalty . . . and sent him to review the showing of spring fashions in department stores.

Unexpectedly, from being the office tag, he fell



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into that opportunity which once is every man's. The failure of a syndicate to deliver its daily children's page set the Powers That Were to trembling in fear of juvenile scorn and infant tears. Some one must concoct and send a children's page to press. Who but Wimble?

You would know at a glance, he was the one for it. He was a meager little fellow, had a pleading eye, a gentle chin; and his forehead owed its size to a thinning scantiness of hair, which he let curl upon his collar. It was not always a clean collar, either, for he had fallen into careless ways of dress, nowadays—especially since his roommate had gone off to war. His nose was very large. Some perfect lady he was desperately in love with pointed him out at a tea as "Weenie Wimble, propelling his nose about the room."

He was no Cyrano about it, though. You could twit him as you pleased. "Napoleon chose his generals by the size of their noses," was his habitually soft answer. "That's why my parents named me Marechal." Then he would always add: "But they forgot the Wimble," and go back to pounding out another day's instalment of the adventures of the tin soldier in the peppermint forest.

Yet it was this poor patronymic, not the Bonapartist handle to it, which helped suddenly to



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shape his destiny. For when they found that he could write a better children's tale than any one else, they thrust him into a niche all his own, and called it "Weenie Wimple's Page." In a mild little way, he came to be a daily feature: men carried home *The Newspaper* in subtle expectation of its being clutched away from them on the threshold of the nursery, and that the dusky bedtime would be charmed and quieted by things that Weeny whispered.

To Wimple at the first, it was a coming into glory. He had a little office to himself: shared a copy boy with no one but the Woman's Page; had his undisputed typewriter, handled a weekly budget to buy poems and puzzles; could write what he pleased and go down to the blue lights and iron slabs of the press room and have it set up as he pleased. He was a marshal, now, but of a world in pinnafores.

That was sixteen years ago. Figure for yourself how many bedtime stories Mr. Wimple has devised since then: every day for sixteen years with the exception of Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year, and the Fourth of July. Even when he went upon his annual vacation, he must leave a fortnight of fairies behind him. The toddlers demanded it. Generations of these had gradu-



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ated into pants and Henty; yet others were born into the rites of elves and bunny rabbits, and Mr. Wimple must write on. Men who had been reporters with him were settling down by now to the portly dignity of the editorial room, or sending precious cables from the battlefronts and conferences. But Mr. Wimple must write on of giants and captive princesses, tin soldiers, Teddy Bears.

He was long past the stage of weariment; such a task would need inveterate sentiment. Mr. Wimple would confess, of his own accord, to fluctuations. His sentiment betrayed, rather than aided, him. He was forever falling in love, forever being left behind. It was his nature, not his fate. His loves were always terrible to bear, and all his friends must bear them with him. Always a large, dominant woman, who always sent him into that abysmal grief where genius spawns. In those periodic intervals of blackness Mr. Wimple would go back into his fairy kingdom with a feeling of majesty; and from his little throne he would commit himself gratefully to the utter unreality of what he wrote. For something close to a month he might display this sad enthusiasm; such tales he made as were the comfort of his heart, the marvel of his youthful readers.

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But too soon, alas, thereafter he would come to talk of it again as a dreary task, an impossible task, tossing letters in dead, childless hands unopened into his basket and curse the day which christened "Weenie Whimble's Page."

What else could it mean but a new love? With it always came new aspirations, summed up in a yearning for admiration and an ambition to break free from smaller things. He would begin to dream again of having children of his own; he would go about announcing decisively that they would be educated in a school situated in Santa Claus; and as for the others—well!

Then, of course, the painful inevitable. And a remorseful agony of imagination . . . his straightened forefingers swift and indolent over his typewriter keys, as if he were climbing his way back through small tunnels into his own, his native Farmland.

2

Possibly you are so young, you do not know the youth which lurks in forty years. Possibly, aside from that, you are so young that your own childhood knew the joys of Weenie Whimble's penny kingdom; and on your way to sleep you



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yourself used to meet that smiling population of his daily fancy. He has remained perhaps a hero to you—more than that, a friend. Well, then, guard a friend's secret. Hold it precious. Mr. Wimple is forty years old, more meager and meek than ever, scantier of hair, and still a bachelor. And once more in love.

This time he puts one half the blame of it upon his former roommate. Benjamin Benvenuto Reni, leaving that rooming house where they had had their modest quarters to go off to war, left Mr. Wimple lonelier than ever. They had begun a famous friendship when Benjamin, up in the art room, had sketched appropriate borders of clowns, hobgoblins, rabbits, witches' brooms to decorate the page. He was foolishly fond of the big, stormy boy; it was his going into uniform which probably gave birth to that series of the Tin Soldier's adventures. Mr. Wimple, traveling home each night to his uptown loneliness, turned elsewhere in a tired, querulous way for consolation.

At twenty the hopes of man soar out to vikings' daughters; at twice that time they are more apt to nestle down to housekeepers. Now that Benjamin was not beside him—and though the Marechal in Mr. Wimple had a dim repugnance for

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it—he was verging towards a worship of their landlady.

“Juno,” he told himself she was, as he sat gazing up at her on the stone stoop of summer evenings. They had all been Junos. This one, it needs conceding, had a good deal of the sculpture to her. She treated Wimple with an easy tolerance, and was proportionately careless in tidying his room. He whispered (to himself) she was a ripe pomegranate, hectic, luscious; he had only seen that fruit in shop windows—and had only gazed on Julie from afar.

There was a mysterious person with black mustaches who came to see her about once a week; and when he came, casting beady glances at the lower step where Wimple, the jester, crouched, he and Julie would go down into the nether regions of the house and jabber until late in an uncouth Italian dialect. But the next night the Queen would sit again at the top of her stone stoop and be once more a copious, quiet silhouette against the lights of the hallway—and Mr. Wimble, sighing to the summer pastoral, would lift his pleading eye and dream the dream of little children.

There was one sultry day, particularly, when the history of the Tin Soldier and the Princess



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Julia could scarcely be written, he was so much immersed in larger loves, so drawn away to adult aspirations. He brought it shuddering to a magic moral, slapped on a happy ending, and sent it down to the composing room. While he waited for his proofs to return the insurgent Marechal in him grew stern and sneerful, and the years of his maundering were dreadful to contemplate. Sixteen behind him, how many more ahead? And never a chance in all of them to leap into some splendid epic. He had the plot of something in his head this very minute: something which would make a magnificent drama—a tragedy in five acts . . . blank verse, of course . . . something with a fine Italian flavor to it, and a heroine with cheeks like the pomegranate's.

The galley proofs arrived, and he went down and pottered with his type and cuts, borders, mortises and such cold, lye-drenched things; and cursed the lack of genius in the art room man who had taken Benjamin Benvenuto's place. It was done at last and the page screwed down and locked, awaiting to-morrow's printing.

He dodged some old woman waiting to see him upstairs with a highly original charade. He was off for home. The hot pressure of the subway reeled him to his station. Three blocks to walk,

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then, through a jumble of playing children . . .
always, always other people's children!

Not far from the corner of Fifty-fourth Street he turned up the brown stoop of his rooming house. Memories of last night's vigil on the middle of one of those steps crowded out, as he mounted them, a realization of their shabbiness and grime. He put his key into the door and swung into the narrow hall. The stairs to the upper stories began almost at the entrance—and somewhere near the top of the first landing the form of Madame Julie filled the space from bannister to wall. He had a glimpse of sturdy legs and a broad back heaving slowly to the higher level. When she turned and looked back his heart began to pound, and he stood there waiting.

"Oh, eet ees you, Meester Weemple?" said the lady of his house and heart. You would have to admit, she used her accent prettily; had a low, lazy way of bringing her labials to the fore.

"I have news for you, Meester Weemple."

What news, oh mighty Juno, could you have for such as Wimple? It was rather his, who stood behind you on the lower landing, to breathe up some message of the magnificence which was you, there in that shadowed hallway! But Marechal let Weenie close the door and say no single word.

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"Meester Reni has come home," continued Julie.

Marechal struck Weenie down and bounded up the stairs.

"Where is he? In my room?"

"No, Meester Weemple, Meester Reni has taken the top floor."

"He——what! He isn't going to live with me again?"

Madame gave the message in its gracious entirety. "He ees married, Meester Weemple. He has brought hees wife. They will live on the top floor. I am just going up there——"

Marechal must have fallen down the stairs and altogether out of sight. Weenie continued mounting in a pained and timorous way.

"Oh, yes! Quite so!" mumbled Mr. Wimple. "Tell them I shall try to call on them very soon."

Then, lonelier than ever, he stopped at the door of his own room, and continued to watch Juno climbing to the heights where marriages are made—and friendships severed.





CHAPTER FIVE

Over the roofs of brown
The red sun sinks him down
While overhead the Sandman's tread
Is heard throughout the town:
"Pitapat, pitapat,
Nothing's awake but the moon and the cat;
And I haye come from the darkling west
To bring my little ones rest."

—From the *Little Rhymes*, etc., of
JENNIE RAFTERY RENI.



CHAPTER FIVE

1

WHEN she writes her memoirs—as she is sure to, in the years which bring her fame—Mrs. Reni will make gently light of all their early difficulties. She will so far forget, no doubt, as to describe the first train journey of her married life as a “wholly uneventful return to the world of men.”

She will forget, first and foremost, the bitterness with which they hurried to depart: how the little house in the mountains had suddenly become a hall of travesty, fit alone for fleeing. Each detail of it wagged a tongue of ridicule, singing the professional praises of Mr. Arimondo’s late butler; and as they locked the door behind them and gave the key into some neighboring farmer’s

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keeping they could have sworn they heard the row of monks upon the chimney piece snickering in their cowls.

For a first time, when they deposited them in the rack of the railway car, they recognized the poor absurdity of their bundles. These were their all: this paintbox and portfolio, this little oilcloth hospital of woefully dismembered lyrics, these few unavailing clothes—these the all they had to face life with. And facing it with four eyes now, they saw it doubly looming—shaping itself, besides, into the metaphoric muzzle of a beast which howled before a door they did not even yet possess.

No wolfish weather this, however. They came down into a season of heat, finding the city languid in light clothes. If there was a moon that night they would not look for it. They emerged from the Grand Central Terminal into the hourly business of the street. Their luggage bobbed a way for them through the streams of people homeward bound. And Jiminy must realize that in their absence the world had lost no breath, no single minute of its race and fury; that theirs alone had been the recess—and it was over.

This much they had planned ahead: they were temporarily at least, to live at Benjamin's

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old rooming house on Fifty-fourth Street. It would be cheap, be comfortable enough and only a few short blocks from the art school where Benjamin was already enrolled. For one of them, too, it carried with it the shabby tingle of returning home. Before the war he had lived there many years. There was Wimple, too; it was improbable that the dear chap had moved away.

Weary of so much riding, they walked across from East to West and breasted Broadway until, at Forty-seventh Street, they came to that cleft parting of the ways of theaters, tawdry restaurants and shop windows which opens a wide Seventh Avenue towards the turrets of Carnegie Hall and the green flank of the park beyond. They followed up to the right, past lighted barricades of delicatessen and automobile accessories, with machines spurting by them, halting at street corners, pumping past again in corpuscular activity.

At Fifty-fourth Street Benjamin Benvenuto guided his wife a few steps eastward again, to where in the center of the block, amidst garages, machine shops and riding stables the house of Julie makes one of a row of old brownstone gentility.

Julie's stoop has banisters of iron, sprinkled with sand and painted thereover to resemble



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stone. Her front door is vestibuled with black and white tiles—not always white, alas, but unique enough along Fifty-fourth Street, west of Sixth Avenue. At the block's other end that avenue's trestle sends elevated trains rattling and clanking through the night, pale yellow windows parading on high.

They mounted to the sinister chequering of this vestibule, Benjamin reaching from force of habit for his old latch key. Then he grinned and rang the bell. There was long to wait, and they had time to find each other's hand and look back dumbly to the opposite side of the street, where the cavern of a garage belched oily fumes, and a mechanic under a machine wriggled and swore for the whole block's hearing.

Then Julie came, and, opening the doorway, filled it with her large surprise.

"Meester R-r-reni!" said she, and gazed upon him with the rapture of a good and steady tenant refound. She included Jiminy and all their miscellany of things in her welcome; planted a kitchen kiss upon the cheek of each of them; had just the room for them on the top floor. The very room—and vacated only this morning by a lady in vaudeville. They mustn't mind it's being in the back, of course. It had an alcove, and the

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alcove had a curtain, and so it was really two rooms—two very nice rooms in one . . . Meester R-r-reni must certainly remember that nice top floor back, just one flight up from where he had lived before, that's all . . . and she was so glad he had come back and brought his nice leetle wife. . . .

2

Thus it came to pass that Mr. Wimble, long since returned from The Paper, crossed the threshold of the top floor back at something like eight o'clock.

He had climbed half way there several times before that hour, and had gone down again to his own room baffled and lacking courage. Once he had heard them laughing, and something within him had leaped at recognizing the broad ring of Benjamin's voice—had leaped to a strange rebellion at hearing mingled with it the higher vivacity of a woman's laughter. The second time he tried there was a silence of embarrassing length; he considered it on tiptoe, and as he came almost to the door he caught the unfamiliar stir of a woman's sobs. Ashamed, he hurried down and closed himself up in his own room. A few



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minutes later the stairs thundered with the well remembered boundings of Benjamin Benvenuto, returning from the corner delicatessen shop. So when Wimple attempted it yet a third time there was a brisk, champing noise of tableware behind their door, and an accompaniment again of talk and laughter. . . . Mr. Wimple, being so inherent a romanticist, guessed the truth of it; that the little Mrs. Reni had been hiding a few meaningless tears away for her husband's momentary absence. Thus he knew himself possessed of a dear secret, felt very tender and, on his way out to a nearby restaurant to have his own lonely meal, lingered in the vestibule for a chance sight of Julie. A flaming pomegranate, mused he, against a chequering of black and white marble . . . and then he said to himself quite loudly: "Oh, pshaw!" and hurried down the street.

Much tea with his dessert fortified him to the point of mounting straightway to the top story when he was in the house again. There was a light in the hallway here, but some one had put it out, and the darkness was wide enough to envelop the form of Julie, who stood motionless towards the door of Mr. and Mrs. Reni's room. She drew back from it reluctantly as Wimple reached the landing.

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"I help them," she drawled in her accents low, and half held out in explanation the trayful of dishes she had furnished them. "They so very nice!"

Mr. Wimple wavered twixt love and duty. "Julie," he accused her, "you—you've been eavesdropping!"

She smiled through the darkness. "Sh!" was her only answer when she was already far down the stairs.

Her warning was in vain. The door swung suddenly open, dashing Mr. Wimple's face with light.

"Who's that?" cried Benjamin Benvenuto. "Oh, it's Wimple!" and fell upon him and dragged him into the room with a howl of delight. "Dear old Wimple! So it's you who've been scratching on our door for the last quarter-hour?"

Mr. Wimple, flushed and blinking, shook his head guiltily. "I? So this," he stammered, his eyes towards Jiminy, "is the future . . . the present. . . . Have I the pleasure. . . ."

"You have," pronounced Benjamin. "It is Jennie Raftery Reni, author of no less a volume than——"

"I know, I know," said Wimple, a little

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sadly—because, for all his daily industry, his stories had never come into the permanence of book covers.

"And Jiminy," continued her husband, "this is the Marechal, Weenie Wimple, best of all friends——"

"I know, I know," said Jiminy, awed in the presence of one whose writings went into the glory of a printed page, to be read upon a hundred thousand hearths each eventide. But she went to him with hands outstretched, and all of Mr. Wimple's timid formalities fled and left him in a sentimental heap.

"I lay awake many nights," said he, "listening to your praises. The boy was always bursting with them when he came home from calling on you." Even though Benjamin were married he was going to persist in his privilege of calling him "the boy."

Jiminy tallied. "And he was always telling me of you, too. Please," she beseeched him, "go on being his friend. And mine."

Mr. Wimple's worn heartstrings gave forth fresh music to the breeze of such a pleading. He cleared his throat, and became uncomfortably aware of the activity of his Adam's apple. "Dear lady," he began. . . .

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3

When they were seated (the room had chairs enough before an open window) he was glad of a comfortable silence, so that he might look across at her and catch the dreamer in her fair, brave face. There was nothing in her eyes to suggest either tears or weariment. The remembrance brought back to him the incident of Julie at the door.

"That was a funny mistake I made," said Benjamin almost simultaneously. "I didn't know it was you when you came up. Could've sworn I heard some one at the door for nearly ten minutes —well, ever since Julie cleared away the supper things. Thought I heard some whispering, too. You weren't talking to yourself, were you?"

"Ha, ha! I?" Poor Wimple's fingers, when he was in a quandary, straightened out and commenced a strange tattoo against the arms of his chair, as if he longed for the security of his typewriter and the gates it beat open into his unsuspected elf-land. He must be loyal . . . at all costs, be loyal. "Well, yes," he said, "perhaps I was talking to myself. Probably was. Foolish

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little habit . . . ha, ha!" Loyal, yes—but to which of them?

Benjamin achieved a heroic sigh. "That's that," said he, relieved. "You see, Weenie, it needs a deal of explaining."

But for the life of him Benjamin could not begin—it seemed so outrageously mad, here on the top floor back of a Fifty-fourth Street rooming house. Jiminy, of higher resolve, took it up for him:

"Mr. Wimple," she began, "do you ever indulge in purely imaginative subjects?"

Mr. Wimple's glance assured him of her earnestness. "Yes, Madam," he replied. "About two hundred lines per day."

She shook her head. "Something," she continued, "no children's page would print. It concerns a precious manuscript, lost——"

To her, too, it seemed all so out of place here in the prose and slang of the vaudeville lady's room. She leaned across to the window, raised the shade and looked out upon a dark obliteration of roofs and back yards, seamed by canyons of clangor.

"Raphael," she commenced again, "loved one Margarita, daughter of Francesco Luti, baker from Sienna. She was the inspiration not only

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of his paintings, but of his hundred verses, too."

Mr. Wimple tried to look interested. He blinked. "But what," he interrupted, "has Julie to do with all this?"

"Julie? Oh, yes! She was clearing the table for us just a little while ago, and we were talking . . . I suppose it was foolish of us . . . about the lost sonnets."

"What lost sonnets?" pursued Wimple, mystified.

"Why, those which Raphael wrote to Margarita. Don't you understand?"

"Oh, yes!" But of course he was far from understanding.

"And suddenly we both saw that Julie was listening very hard to what we said—listening while she worked—and her big, fat hands trembled so that she could scarcely lift the dishes away."

Mr. Wimple's fingers typed furiously against the revolt of his Adam's apple. "Her hands, now," he said, "are they really so—so fat?"

Jiminy ignored it as a gross irrelevance. "She only spoke up once, and that was to ask us where we had spent our honeymoon. When I told her in Nazareth, the strangest glitter came——"

"Nazareth?" Mr. Wimple broke in again.

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"New Hampshire. The loveliest spot on earth—well, it was so once, anyhow!"

"Stupid little house," added Benjamin Benvenuto, not without a growl, "furnished by somebody's ex-butler, now in the antique business!"

Outside the door there was the swift brush of a body against the panels. All three of them sat up very straight. Mr. Wimple, facing the door, saw its knob settle back into immobility.

"It's nothing at all," said he. "You . . . you people must remember that a city house is full of strange little noises."

They tried to tell him a little more of their two weeks in the mountains. But he was all raw, scraping nerves now.

"Charming," he said, coming quickly to his feet. "Especially about this—this Raphael."

He was purposely noisy about it: it was one of the few occasions in his guileless life when he had had to use duplicity. But the person on the other side of that door must be warned that he was coming out. . . .

"Well, good night," he fairly shouted, "good night, my dears. Had a lovely evening. See you soon—" and slipped his way from the room.

He closed the door quickly behind him. Coming

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out of the light he was helpless in this darkness of the hall. His hands groped—and found nothing but the newel post at the head of the stairs.

"Julie," he whispered. "Julie."

No answer came. Instead, there was the heavy fleeing of some one already near the foot of the steps; and half seeing by the light which governed the hallway on this lower landing, half guessing by the sound, he realized that it was not Julie—but a man.

He wondered whether he ought not go back and tell them about it. But he did not understand what the fellow, whoever he was, could have been doing up here. Was he some other topfloor roomer, perhaps? Why had he lingered, then, to listen at the Reni threshold? He did not understand, either, why he could not hear the front door, downstairs, slam with the man's exit. . . . There was so much he did not understand.

Perhaps he ought to go down into the basement and inform Julie. Yet probably it was past Julie's bedtime, and . . . Mr. Wimple blushed and, tingling with the boldness of the evening, went on into his own chamber, where he sat for a long while in troubled contemplation

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of his stockinged feet, until his ancient crony and partner, the Sandman, came to give him peace and rest. Towards morning, too, a dream of hide and seek with dark, heavy-treading men and Junoesque women in a hallway which ushered brightly out upon an orchard of pomegranate trees. . . . So that he awoke out-of-sorts and racking his brain to remember whether pomegranates really grew on trees, bushes or what . . . or whether only in shop windows.

4

In the top floor back the night had been altogether dreamless. Almost sleepless, too. The change to strange, impersonal quarters; to the heat, moistness and unflagging noise of the city; to the headquarters of relatives and work and all those things which blocked life off into sober paragraphs of prose—the whole of it bore down upon them and kept them wakeful until a colorless dawn. Sometime during the night, too, it is possible that they switched on the light again and struggled with little columns of figures: totals too little, and a balance even less.

There was only one more extravagance they could allow themselves thereafter; and this was thrust upon them rather than of their own ar-

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ranging. For when they came out into the early morning streets, and walked all aimlessly down Seventh Avenue and later crossed some side street towards Fifth, Jiminy suddenly tugged her husband's arm and brought him to a halt.

They stared together at the show of plate glass and rich metal lettering which distinguished a big book shop on the other side of the street. Yes, this was it . . . on Forty-something Street, they remembered. Anyhow, there was a pompous sign over each of its three entrances, and nothing left for doubt.

"So this," said Jiminy, in quite the quietest way she could, "is our quaint little place of musty volumes and tattered art plates!"

"If Albrecht Durer ever saw this emporium," began Benjamin Benvenuto. But then he stopped, stood his straightest, and commenced again: "Daniel Arimondo, dealer in books, breaker of dreams, patron of ex-butlers, we salute you. The day has truly begun!"

Some little stock boy, peeking through the gorgeous Arimondo-windows, could hear none of this: could only see them resume their dignified procession—and wonder why the lady, though her husband would not notice it, lagged a few steps behind and must look back.





CHAPTER SIX

Work-a-day, shirk-a-day,
Neither rhyme, nor reason
Have the clue to what I rue,
In and out of season:
To-morrow night a sorrow night,
The same as yestermorn—
Nor even I can tell you why
I am so fair forlorn!

—From the *Little Rhymes*, etc., of
JENNIE RAFTERY RENI.



CHAPTER SIX

1

A MOTH came fluttering and pounding, some two months thereafter, against a screened window of the topfloor back. He was one of your dusty little banes, city born and city bred, mannerless, flashless of wings: a mere pest to be chased and demolished before he might settle down and wreak his twitching villainies on the laid away dress clothes.

But even to hear him struggling towards the light must have reminded Jiminy, who sat next the window, of his bigger, brighter fellows who had come catapulting through the casements of the Nazareth bungalow, great white wings impelling towards a blazing doom. Then, too, of his cousin butterflies, all the noonday's gold re-

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flected from their hovering spirals over the clover.

Surely there was no treason, she told herself, in thinking back upon it, now and again. Nevertheless she took good care to turn her head away from Benjamin Benvenuto. One earlier evening, as they sat there, he had caught the look upon her face and, far too quick in understanding it, had eased his own restlessness by delivering her a lecture, sound and sternly sensible.

"It's all to be forgotten," he ordered. "Mid-summer madness enough for me to be using your last few dollars at the art school!"

Jiminy had realized that the mood for penitence was in order. (It was one recurring ever more frequently nowadays.) "Yes," she had agreed, "and for me to be idling with literature when I might be making a fortune for two by addressing another lot of little rhymes to little readers!"

That was the only time she had spoken outright of this temptation. But it had assailed her often during the days when Benjamin was at his lessons and she alone at the topfloor back's worktable. Once she had even dared to mention it to Wimple, when she met him on the stairs; and he had crowed with delight to assure her that Weenie's celebrated Page would be happy

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to purchase and print her verses at double leaded space rates.

"Provided, of course," he added clumsily, "that they are suitable in subject . . . you know, for children." And there was such a sadness on his chin as he said it that Jiminy could guess the tragedy of his own life's work.

So far, however, there was neither need nor occasion for these extremities. Benjamin went sturdily out upon his way to the summer session of the art school each morning, and returned each evening with a fresh tale of something learned—dented the tablecloth with a fingernail sketch of Hambidge diagonals or went into ecstasies over the possibilities of red chalk in drawing nudes.

Lately she had often had to prod him with questions before he would talk of it. She wondered if he were growing tired of his schooling. Then he would pluck up his enthusiasm again, his eyes go merry, his cheeks flush, while he raced to a description of how prodigiously easy all these lessons and exercises were for him . . . how speedy and sure of his brush and pencil his training down on The Paper had made him . . . and how it needed only this year or two of theories, lectures and guidance before he should be proud

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of himself . . . yes, and she, too, would be proud of him!

She was all of that already. "I'm sure," she had told him, remembering back upon her own affiliations with a school, "your teachers must praise you very highly. Don't they?"

"Well," said Benjamin, not without a little forethought, "it's not exactly that sort of place, but——"

"Ah," cried Jiminy, "then they do!" And had been tremendously satisfied that she had gone without her lunch that day. It had been hot, and things to eat cost very much hereabouts . . . and Benjamin would never know.

He had, as a matter of fact, some sixty sacred dollars which the Government had given him when it discharged him from its olive drab. She had refused to add them to the general coffer: he must keep them for his pocket money over the summer, while he was in art school. It was amazing, too, how they lasted, these little dollars. The world about them might work itself into a furor of editorials and tirades concerning the pinnacled cost of living; yet Benjamin Benvenuto, in the very midst of extravagance's dwelling place, bought himself a suit of citizen's clothes, paid carfares—even once, upon a too oppressive night,

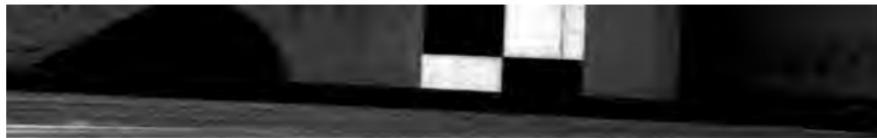
JIMINY

a taxi—tipped waiters, and brought home a weekly little nosegay from the florist's without either sigh or sign of bankruptcy. So Jiminy, marveling, added this to his attributes, and was the prouder for it.

2

For all that, however, you were warned, this will not be a totally exotic fairy tale. Look, then, for the lute's one human rift. Jiminy was not so secretive of her tears, these days, and there were times when Benjamin, rough with his months in the army, yapped, yawned and sat sulkily apart from her in awkward mortification. The heat of the topfloor back had them pale and weary; the brawling commonplaceness of the neighborhood weighed their spirits down; the smiling, sloe-eyed inquisitiveness of the full-blown Julie was a daily irritation to them.

And to-night—this night of the moth—they had quarreled. Why and concerning what? They could scarcely have told you themselves. Jiminy, so it seemed, had gone to call for Benjamin that afternoon at the art school, so that they might walk home together under colonnades of evening lamplight. She had never done it be-



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fore, and, as she stood waiting on the opposite side of the street, had felt suddenly lonely for him, eager for his coming. It was much the same feeling she had had, that first day, when his transport was returning from abroad. But this time the door of the art school swang back and forth with a continuous telling off of its roster,—and there was no Benjamin Benvenuto. She had waited until the dusk was darkness, and the door of the school had creaked a last time and been locked for the nightly interim; then she had hurried home alone.

Benjamin had been there, it seemed, a comfortable while before her arrival. She was too straightforward, though, to get her answer by trickery. Where had he been, she asked him—and told him of her disappointed walk.

The fellow had grown dark immediately with a private consternation. "I knew it would happen!" said he, mostly to himself. Then louder: "I left the school very early this afternoon. Must just have missed you!"

Then, when she asked him, why so early, he took refuge in a rage and forbade her ever to call for him at the school again. And to cover this up he had had to wind it round with a skein of evasions, each more unconvincing than the next.

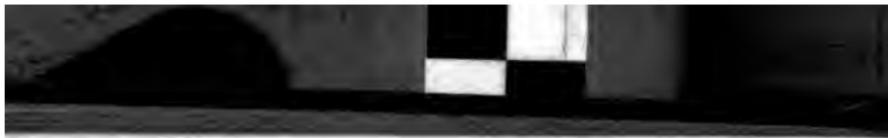
JIMINY

Quickly flew the "why" and the "why not," a bald "because," curt "never mind," till all the armory of verbal warfare was afire with dudgeon, flooded with tears.

Then came that little moth, who marked the minutes of their sullen truce with the struggle of his wings against the window screen. And Jiminy's thoughts—small wonder!—had gone back with greater longing than ever to the idyl of Nazareth, and to the cricket of an empty hearth, who had no one, now, to serenade excepting the Margarita, whose parents were a baker of Sienna and a cheap engraving press . . . Margarita, beauteously beloved!

"And oh, my dear," she boldly said, "my very dear, I know the answer to it all!"

But Benjamin's brows were knit with gloom, and he pretended that this, their present world of room and alcove on the topfloor back, had need of neither question nor answer. Yet he slept ill, that sultry night; and it was Jiminy, bathed in a fresh determination, who drifted first into that realm where discontent grows dim and longings gird themselves with magic.



JIMINY

3

She told him nothing of it the next morning, but when she had packed him off for school, went straight upon her expedition to the large and glassy establishment of Daniel Arimondo, Inc. A boy of many buttons marshalled her through revolving doors: sentry clerks met her every foot-step and inquired the password of her tastes in reading. Regiments of books along the walls waited in reserve until battalions on the table had gone through their annihilating sale. There was a constant maplan of parcels being wrapped. There were monster iron galleries, packed with further reserves of this printed soldiery: leather backed buzzars, grenadiers in white silk, crack cavalry in coze, morocco and levant. A whole heavy artillery of standard sets occupied thundering tiers. Casuals of French and Spanish paper-backs were scattered in strategic gaps. Great arc lights shelled the aisles and all who scurried in them with a white intensity. And generalissimo of all this battle of the books, Daniel Arimondo sat far in the onyx and bronze magnificence of his private office, and dictated further plans of conquest to his stenographing aides-de-camp.

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Into the circle of his Presence there was brought a shrinking prisoner. He looked serenely from the little slip of paper some other set of buttons had presented him—whereon, for purposes of reminding him, faltered the name of Jennie Raftery—to where she stood her inquiet ground, a broad, carved desk's width away.

"Miss Raftery?" he boomed.

She was aware of a stout giant who lifted his head with a calm, slow energy from out of a bank of secretaries. Up, up came the great round occiput of him, full red and shadowed with impatience; stayed then at that highly couched angle between two hugely hewn shoulders, like the Great Orb itself caught between mountains of a summer sunset. The bravery with which she had begun the day was wilting fast.

"Miss Raftery?" came again the slow, Jovian rumble.

"Oh, yes sir."

"I have heard that name before." It was a down-right accusation.

"The bungalow. I——"

"Yes, I remember." And when he remembered, it was as if he were granting a favor beyond human gratitude. "You liked it there."



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"Oh, indeed yes, thank you!" It would never do to mention the ex-butler. . . .

Most mortals, when they would dispatch a visitor with suavity, fall back on an embarrassed, "Well, sir, and what can I do for you?" Else they drum their desks, at least, and vent a meaningful "Ahem." But a single glance was enough, when that glance was Daniel Arimondo's. It was a leisurely, sure look of untrammeled significance which traveled from Jiminy's face to her feet, then tracked along the carpet to the sanctum's outer door.

"I have come," stated Jiminy, without further ado, "to ask you concerning the hundred lost sonnets of Raphael."

It was as if a little cloud had gone in racing and dark silhouette across the ruddy heat of Daniel Arimondo's brow. Then, once again, the withering serenity of his round stare.

"What, Miss—er Miss Raftery, should I know concerning them?"

"I thought perhaps . . . where they are."

The eyes of the great luminary scorched Jiminy's clothes as they took their leisurely computing of her wealth and station. "You wish to buy them, Miss Raftery?"



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Jiminy leaped to the quarry. "Then they can be found!"

The ball of fire clouded and cleared once more. "In the British Museum," it uttered, "are two excellent examples of Raphael's poetical works."

"But the sonnets—the book of a'whole hundred sonnets!" persisted Jiminy. "You mean that they can be found?"

"It is my business, Miss—er—Raftery, to find rare volumes for my clients." There was a pause saturated with effulgent awe. "The Italian Government has searched the world for them for more than two centuries."

"Then, should you—should they be found, it would cost—they would be very valuable?"

"They would be priceless."

There was a measured finality to his saying of this, and once more did his glance go forth upon its blazing orbit towards the door. It was seldom that any person could withstand its deliberate command a second time.

"Mr. Arimondo," cried Jiminy, erect with a last minute valiance, "though it takes the writing of enough verses to paper the nurseries of a nation, I am coming back to you some day—and my pockets will be full!"

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"Priceless," repeated Mr. Arimondo. "Priceless!"

But then suddenly his Phoeban look halted her again at the threshold, between a bronze of Gutenberg and a big steel safe.

"You are a poetess?"

It was neither time nor place to deny the solemn charge.

"A coincidence," he went on. "A young man, an artist, came here three weeks ago, upon the same errand as you. Do you know him?"

Jiminy began to tremble. "What was his name?" she succeeded in asking.

"He did not give his name. He reached this room on a pretext of wanting to sketch me, so he said, in the Albrecht Durer style. I was not flattered."

But Mr. Arimondo's face was neither humorous nor indignant; and its imperturbable glow of business routine remained steadfast to its roundness as he watched the little Jiminy go white and seek the big bronze arm of Gutenberg for swift support.

"It was my husband," she explained.

"Your husband, Miss—er . . . ?"

"Raftery was my maiden name. The name under which I hired the bungalow." But why



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grovel with details in the face of so majestic an enlightenment? "He wanted to know about the sonnets, too?" she asked, knowing scarcely whether she would weep or laugh. "And you told him?"

"Precisely what I told you. Good day, Mrs.—er—Raftery." It was the first time in the memory of the Arimondo universe that he had ever had to put that phrase into speech.

"Good day," came the short breath of Jiminy, "but I—we—shall come again!"

4

Burrowing down to Newspaper Row, the subway guard felt it his duty to the traction company to suspect why the little young woman in the corner seat smiled so hard at the iron pillars and local stations they flew past. Sometimes she laughed quite aloud, then brushed her eyes, and was whispering to herself something which the roar of their passage obliterated, but which had trained her lips to a constant repetition of a phrase like, "Dear boy, the dear boy!"

But when she had come to the portals of The Paper she was transformed into such a fury of resoluteness that copy boys, reporters and whole



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roundtables of editors were as nothing in her sight. They led her to a little office, one of a low, narrow row; one which differed from its fellows only in that its walls were plastered with cut-out illustrations from fairy tales, puzzles, mottos, diagrams for the young carpenter, paper dolls and all the rest of that paraphernalia of ideas which has gone to make Weenie Wimple's Page so famous. There were hooks, too, cata-racting galley proofs of varying freshness. Here and there, awkward adults in this kindergarten, theatrical photographs appeared of high-bosomed, Junoesque women.

In the center of this little place (which doubtless you read of, in times juvenile, as the well known Weenie Wimple's Corner) sat that great one himself, more melancholy than all his surroundings. He was crashing out his morning's exercises on the typewriter—an adventure, this time, of Peter Piper in the land of Many Minerals—and it needed only a consultation with the art editor to complete it. Mr. Wimple's typewriter was one of the old non-visible sort, and he was so innately a gentleman that he blushed when he had to lift its front skirts and peek thus on the balderdash he had been writing.

When Jiminy was announced to him, and came



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in straight upon the heels of the announcement, it might have been some such gentility which caused him to fall into so marked a fluster.

"Why, Mrs. Reni! Goodness gracious, I'm just expecting . . . just sent a boy up for the art man! Little pictures, you know, for the page. Dear me, and did you want to see me about something?"

"Yes, about the verses. You remember what you promised, don't you? I want to do hundreds and hundreds of little verses for you. That is, if you'll let me."

Mr. Wimple quivered under a multiplicity of emotions. "Why, to be sure! I will be delighted, Mrs. Reni . . . and . . ."

"Will you really? Do you mean it?"

"Oh, yes, absolutely!" He twisted about in some apprehension he would hide from her. "It's all arranged, then . . . I'll call to-night on you two, anyhow, and we'll . . . then. . . . You see, there's a new art man . . . or, rather, an old one, you see . . . and there are lots of things I have to . . ."

But then, hearing some one come whistling down the hall of offices, he almost collapsed with a sigh of "Too late! too late!"

For there, in his old work-apron, and with his

JIMINY

hands full of niggard photographs and sketches, stood one Benjamin Benvenuto Reni.

"Do you want me, Wimple?"

It was the Marechal in him which conquered for once. "No," he replied, shrill with his sympathy for them both, "but I think your wife does!"

He rushed him over to where a crumpled little person, stupified and humble, had taken sudden hiding behind the door.

Then he went quickly out, so that he might neither see nor hear their meeting.

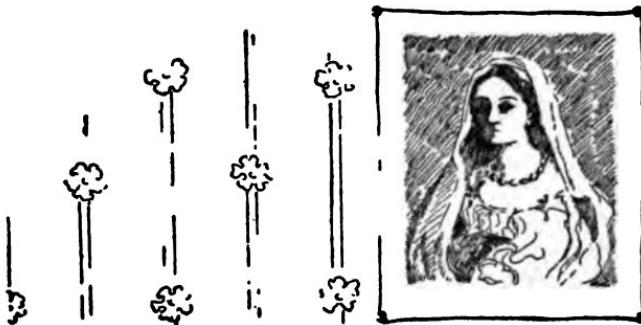


CHAPTER SEVEN



The sun which shines down country lanes
Shines, too, on city windowpanes;
And famous worlds are spread for you
Who find the glass and can look through.

—From the *Little Rhymes*, etc., of
JENNIE RAFTERY RENI.



CHAPTER SEVEN

1

BENJAMIN," said Jiminy that evening, when dinner was done, and a score of explanations had been recounted and smiled upon for at least a second time, "go look in the table drawer."

By way of assisting him she lifted her head from his shoulder. He went reluctantly, and was rewarded by discovering a flat parcel and a penny's worth of tacks.

"Now," said she, "open your parcel."

"Our parcel," corrected Benjamin, "no matter what it holds!"

So it was, indeed. For when he had unwrapped it he looked down upon the features of La Fornarina.

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Jiminy was quick to forestall him. "It's a brutal little print, I know," she apologized. "But I had to go everywhere for it. I asked for her under every possible name in every sort of art shop. They had the usual Madonnas, of course, but Margarita . . . they shrugged me away."

Benjamin Benvenuto looked up from his adoring contemplation. He had taken in the one shilling sixpence mark on the print's corner, and the monstrosity of lithographic colors which daubed the Donna Velata's cheeks and made sad fustian of her textures. But it was she, the same.

"When did you do all this?" he asked.

"Oh, weeks and weeks ago."

"So all this while . . ."

"Yes," she told him, unafraid and understanding now. "All this while. And you too, handsome hypocrite. All the while you were supposed to be in art school!"

He made considerate attempts at seeming guilty. "It's only for a year or two," he protested. "Then when we've saved enough. . . . It's a different thing, Jiminy, to save and slave for such a purpose. A pleasant thing, I've found it."

"Even in secret," corroborated Jiminy. "And

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now, when we're bound together . . . up, up, my very dear, and nail our pledge upon the wall!"

Together they accomplished it. Jiminy held the tacks which Benjamin drove into the top floor back's best wallpaper with the heel of an old army shoe. Then they stood back glowingly to look upon her.

"There's certainly a shilling sixpence's worth of colored inks in her," said Benjamin.

"But the secret in her eyes," replied his wife, "remains—well, priceless! Priceless!" Whereat they laughed immoderately and Jiminy went on to tell:

"They sent me finally to a dark old print shop on lower Madison. There was an old man there who searched his bins for me and found it at last—imported from England, he said, and probably the Fornarina's only print in all New York. He was so old and quaint, I asked him what he knew about her."

"Well, what? Tell me!"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing. Merely referred me to Vasari."

"Bah!"

"Yes. He was so very kindly. Just what we thought our Arimondo ought to be. Then he discovered that I hadn't the least intention of buying

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the art plates from his own second hand set of Vasari—and showed me the door. He knew less about it all than we do."

Benjamin Benvenuto saddened down. "In the beginning," he said, "before I went back—before I did anything else, I pored over every possible book in the Public Library. Every obtainable Life of Raphael in English or Italian. It was no use. Not a hint in any one of them. Then I went the rounds of the famous bibliophiles, the booksellers. Most of them merely stared at me. A few who knew a little more could only roar me away as a maniac. At first I wouldn't even include the name of Daniel Arimondo. But as the list grew shorter I added him at the bottom. He was the last possible man for me to see." Involuntarily Benjamin seemed to grow hot and discomfited at the memory of some recent interview. "You know what happened when I did see him!"

Jiminy knew enough of it, at any rate, to guess the rest. "He is even more awful," she admitted, "than we imagined him." Yet he was the only one of the lot who gave us the least hope."

"Hope? Fine hope, that! Hot old hope!" Then he added validly: "I'm glad I didn't give him my name. At first I was ashamed to: I was

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on such a wild chase. Later on, he was so big and pursy about it!"

"But you don't think, do you," asked Jiminy, "that when he said 'priceless' he meant . . ."

"Oh, he meant the prices his rich clients have to pay!"

"I wonder."

2

Some one knocked upon the door. So timid a knock it was that Benjamin cried out at once:

"Come on in, Wimple"—and in he came.

Mr. Wimple wore a look of expectancy. He was prepared for a welling of sentiment. He had bared his heart to receive soft chidings from Jiminy, because he had secretly paved the way for Benjamin to return to The Paper. He was ready to entertain delightful queries, in turn, from Benjamin; then to bestow a wistful bachelor's blessing on them both.

They gave him no such opportunity, however. For they seized each an arm of him and marched him solemnly up before the picture.

"Marechal Wimple, turner of tales," said Benjamin Benvenuto, "you are standing in the pres-

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ence of sublimity itself. This is the Margarita, donna of Raphael."

"Bow down," sang Jiminy. "Worship and call her beautiful."

But Mr. Wimple did not bow down. He looked first at the picture, then pleadingly at each of them, then back to the picture again. He put on a pair of shell-rimmed glasses, looked again and could not quell the fluctuations of his Adam's apple.

"It . . . very nice," he stammered. "The very image of Julie!"

"Julie!"

The profanation made them recoil, but Wimple rushed into the horrid pause: "Yes, can't you see the resemblance? Not now, of course, but when she was younger . . . not much, but just a little younger. . . . She—" absurd little spots of pink assailed his cheeks—"I think you'll admit that Julie is still . . . well, it's a matter of taste, I suppose."

It was difficult enough forgiving him this. But the next moment brought Julie's own coincidental knock, and in she came, by due appointment, to clear the supper dishes.

"Here, Madame Julie," cried an unctuous Wimple, "come and see yourself!"

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Madame Julie set down her tray and came. She had only a half-second's glance, and her broad back made a wall against betrayal. But when she turned about again her blouse swelled with storm, and the glare which she distributed amongst the three of them was so hard and glittering that they fell back. She left her tray with the dishes, slowly curved her fists down to her hips and walked from the room.

Mr. Wimple's was the greatest consternation. "I'm so sorry," he kept gasping. "Truth is . . . well, I don't know . . . I suppose she didn't like the idea of . . . of tacks in the wallpaper."

Benjamin growled. "Tacks! Weenie, you poor old fool. . . ."

"Oh don't," cried Jiminy. "Mr. Wimple must have meant well!"

Mr. Wimple had been meaning well all his life . . . so well, so desperately . . . but he was bewildered now, and grateful for the least of kindness.

"Thank you, Mrs. Reni," he sighed as he removed his misting glasses. "I did . . . I really meant the best. And it does look like Julie, doesn't it?"

Jiminy granted a plausible resemblance. She had already found time, during the day, to com-

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pound some of those verses which the budget of Weenie Wimple's Page might buy.

3

Mr. Wimple took these from her, and, during succeeding days, many more. Truth demands telling that The Paper paid her very little for them—it was a Paper of such prestige that double leaded space rates could afford to be its uttermost extravagance—but Jiminy put by this little with the weekly knowledge that it would some day grow great. She and Benjamin had started a joint savings account, now, in an all-night bank a few blocks down on Seventh Avenue; so that, whatever hour they passed the place, it was peopled and lighted with good omen.

Late one night, on coming home from such a walk, they found the silhouette of Julie blocking the front doorstep. Mr. Wimple was not at her feet, however (since the coming of the Reni he had felt somehow ashamed of too pronounced or public demonstrations) and the door behind Julie was open to the evening heat. Julie had forgotten all that animosity about the picture, evidently: she cleaned their room each morning, cleared their

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table every evening with a gracious dependability. She smiled down upon them even now as they climbed the steps, and commenced to fan herself with a large, white palmleaf.

"Good-night," she drawled for them, "good-night, Meester an' Meesers. . . ."

But, when they had gone within and were a safe distance up the stairs, they could not see that she dropped the fanning, rose and went into the house herself, towards the basement bound. Or that a little dark man on the opposite side of the street, equally silhouetted against the square of some garage door, had taken the signal and come straightway over to let himself into the house by means of the basement gate. Nevertheless, there was a soft scratching on the panels of their door ten minutes later: so soft it was that it could have been made only by the brushing of large mustaches, the property of some one who wanted to let no word escape his ears.

But of what possible worth was it to any sane and city man to hear them whisper of a painter four centuries dead and famous? Of a baker's daughter who lived in love to die in misery? And to hear them argue, plead, decide at length that the time was come—yes, it must be done—come at last when they should go again, with



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their few dollars and persistent hopes, to see one Mr. Arimondo. To-morrow, then. . . .

A fine reward, such talk as this, for any ordinary prowler! Doubtless the mustaches drooped and were gnashed by the teeth of chagrin. Leave the poor fellow to his lesson—and to his hasty groping down the stairs again, into the waiting basement. But whatever he thinks of it all, there is a light down there long after the upper stories of the house are dark, and hours of swift Italian whispering precede his final departure.

4

Nor had his ear deluded him. For, true enough, it befell that with the next morning Mr. and Mrs. Reni should make their determined re-entry across the battleground of Daniel Arimondo, Inc. Also that Jiminy should write with important vigor upon a slip the buttoned boy had handed her, the information that Mr. and Mrs. Reni (in capitals not to be misconstrued!) desired to see Mr. Arimondo in regard to purchasing a commodity listed as priceless.

Mr. Arimondo, at this hour, had no bank of secretaries about him. There was a fierceness, a

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blinding completeness to him which even the sun itself can have at only cloudless intervals. When he looked down upon the rebellious little slip, earth and sky seemed fearful of remaining upright. He scarcely read the writing there; saw merely something in regard to purchases.

"Show them in," he rumbled. And all the little buttons, flashing back reflections of his awe, showed them in.

"So it's you?"

Had mortal man given way to such a short expression, there might have been something weakly sour, sad, surprised: might have meant anything, including a few chance fragments of hope. Coming from the lips of Daniel Arimondo it meant impersonal, irrevocable disappointment.

Standing together before him, they pressed against each other in a spiritual terror. Their hands touched, and Jiminy flung out a war cry of despair:

"You were the only one who told us they might be found!"

"I told you they would never be for sale."

"'Priceless,' you said. . . ."

"And that is what I mean. Go home, forget the whole of it."

Benjamin's knuckles whitened with the clenches-

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ing of his fists. "He knows where they are," he whispered.

"Forget?" There was a little sob from Jiminy, and her voice wavered into huskiness: "How can we forget when all that we live and work for is the finding of them? My husband has given up his art school, gone back to his newspaper. I have thrown away every other dream and ambition I ever knew, and am writing. . . . We have begun to save—oh, just a little—but there will be more. In years to come, perhaps, much more."

Mr. Arimondo was not for a moment moved or interested. "Yes," he said slowly, "an artist and a poet. I remember. A pretty combination to make a pretty English edition of Raphael, with pretty and appropriate marginal illustrations——"

"No!" cried Jiminy.

"Bah!" cried her husband.

No matter. No use. They need not trouble themselves to come to him again.

The scorching Arimondo's eyes set out upon their familiar and significant travel from his desk to his door. They did not go that distance, though.

For there, on the desk's face, his eyes discovered

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the printed slip which Jiminy had filled with such defiant writing. And on this slip they stayed rooted in enlarging marvel.

"Stop!" he beseeched them. The enormity of some strange amazement had sent his magnificence into instantaneous eclipse. The great man rose from his desk-chair. He had to grasp the back of it for steadiness.

"Your name," he said, "is Reni. It says so here."

"My name is Reni," acknowledged a stiff Benjamin.

"How did you come by that name?"

"I was born with it."

"Is there a Guido in your full name?"

"No, but I remember that my grandfather——"

"A Scipione? A Pietro?" Mr. Arimondo came nearer him and nearer.

"My father's name——"

"A Benvenuto? Answer me!"

"That is my middle name."

Arimondo, Inc., sank away into the arms of his bronze Gutenberg which on a similar occasion had supported a far fairer waist than his.

"Forgive me!" he gasped. "I did not know!"



—



CHAPTER EIGHT

I have a tale to tell to you,
And when your ears receive it,
Remember that no tale is true
Unless you dare believe it.

—From the *Little Rhymes*, etc., of
JENNIE RAFTERY RENI.



CHAPTER EIGHT

1

ONCE the totality of this eclipse was past, Mr. Arimondo shone down upon them with an altogether different sort of light. He had a few more troubled moments of staring at them blankly, while they returned his stupefaction doublefold. But then, as these periods of incredulity wore off, such kindliness and pleasure came into his ways that each of them fell to smiling and nodding to the other, quite as new found friends.

Mr. Arimondo pulled out his watch. It was the very fat, golden watch which Jiminy knew he should carry; she saw, too, that the dial of it was a quaint masterpiece of Venetian mosaic.

"Eleven-thirty. If you will share lunch with

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me, I shall eat it a half hour earlier than usual."

Benjamin, having visions of being carried off and put upon display in the dining room of some nearby hotel, could only fidget with his dubious cuffs and careless necktie. It was Jiminy who nodded.

"Very well," said Arimondo, "come with me."

He led them to a smaller door set into the paneling behind his desk. "Go in," he invited them, and opened it. "I shall be with you directly."

He had no need to touch a buzzer. No sooner had he put his hand upon the knob than there appeared one of the little boys of buttons, carrying a milk bottle, pearly with cold, a glass and a box of soda biscuits.

"Bring me two more glasses."

They were brought in fearful haste. He took them, went within. So solemnly he closed the door behind him that, no matter what avalanche of books and sales took place in the great shop outside, he would never know it or be interrupted. No sooner was it closed, and his luncheon things set down upon the arm of a lazy old morris chair, than all his gravity was lost again in lively beaming.

The room into which he had transferred them

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was small, astonishingly untidy. Gray light surrounded it, and pensiveness hung above many ancients of furniture. Along the walls were a few shelves of tatterdemalion paupers and outcasts from that world of books wherein Arimondo was crowned king. The table was spread with dog-eared magazines which dated from the Civil War, and which, thrown open to the dust, displayed quaint persons with long side-whiskers or protruding pantaloons. In a corner niche were stacked some veteran art plates, most of them yellowed and worthless steel engravings. Benjamin stood looking perplexedly at these, powerless to label the precise memory which the spirit of the place suggested.

Jiminy, with a sly finger among the magazines, had actually discovered the Cornhill of fifty years ago. Mr. Arimondo, genially engaged in pouring three rimful glasses of milk, looked up and caught her at it.

"In here," he quietly explained, "are the books and things I genuinely love: all the wayward, two penny wags who've been banished years ago from the libraries of self-respecting persons. I've a Vasari, for instance, which I picked up in Florence for the equivalent of eight cents, and its salable value is two cents less than that. But nothing

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in the world—I presume,” he broke off, looking over towards Benjamin Benvenuto, “that you know your Vasari.”

“Oh yes, and the rest of them.”

“Good, my boy! But you didn’t find what you wanted in any of them.”

“No.” It was an expectant sort of confession.

Arimondo, having handed around the glasses, began to sip at his own milk and break his soda biscuits into little parts. “You are the first persons ever to see me here at lunch,” he confided. “I must keep it a secret. My office force has a vision of my being at my club every noon hour, feasting fittingly on salmi of duck or oeufs Benedictine at the very least. But this is my clandestine mutiny. This, I may even say, is the true Arimondo.”

He gulped a little more milk, took in another discreet fraction of his soda biscuit, before he continued: “My whole day belongs to the standard authors and the leather-backs out there. My evenings must go to calling on rich bibliomaniacs—and since I am an old bachelor they invariably ask me to dinner, and I invariably have to go.” He sighed. “The dyspepsia, my dears, is not the worst of it!”

“But this,” cried Jiminy, “is just the sort of

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place we dreamed you'd have. Just as small . . . and cozy."

"Did you?" He was gratified. "So I steal here for an hour a day—it is all I can allow—and browse among the worthless old things I have secretly loved since I was a boy. It is the only chance I have to grow decently old. Big business, you know,—outside there,—demands inveterate youth. Of course, I really was young once, and was slender and wore a beard——"

"We knew even that," said Jiminy. "A long gray one."

"Oh no, golden and trimmed prettily in the style of the Parisian students. I was studying in Rome at that time." He sighed again, set down his glass and let his voice succumb to cautiousness. "I was very much a poet then. A lover of all things Italian—their art, their poetry, the big black eyes of their . . . it was very long ago, my dears. . . ."

He had to rouse himself. "Then, I returned to America, and became a cleanshaven businessman. It wasn't all done with one visit to the barber. At first, I used to go off into open rebellion for weeks at a time. I built a little bungalow in the White Mountains, and I'd steal up there with Sancho as my only companion.

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"Sancho I called him, after the inimitable Panza. He was a swarthy young urchin when I first discovered him polishing his stiletto on the quays at Naples. I took him to Rome with me, where he served me as valet and companion in a few adventures. He knew the city so well, and the people. He had a wit, a flashing eye, a budding wisp upon his lip which all the girls of the quarters fell in love with—and he stole from me only in proportion to his extraordinary services. I couldn't bear leaving him behind. I brought him with me to America. Figaros were out of the question here. So I called him my butler. He played truant every little while with another piece of my silverware, but always came back in time to accompany me to the bungalow."

"Then you really loved the little place?" asked Jiminy. "And furnished it yourself, didn't you?"

Mr. Arimondo was at the zenith of his good nature. "I didn't know you when I wrote that note," he begged pardon, "nor anything about you. It's the first rule of the American business man never to exhibit sentiment. And for a matter of fact, as the years went by and I became busier, more closely strapped to my desk, I couldn't steal away to the bungalow . . . lost

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interest in it, let it out for rent at charitable rates to school teachers."

"But to blame it on an ex-butler! Oh, Mr. Arimondo!"

"Well, grant me a grain of truth. Sancho came to me one fine day with the wish to leave my employ. He gave no very good reason; wanted, he said, to have a business of his own. I set him up in an antique shop on Battery Square and even went so far as to buy a few atrocious things from him, which I hung on the bungalow walls for old time's sake. I was fond of the scamp, you see—and he'd served me well, in his fashion."

While the narration lapsed again to silence and soda biscuits, Benjamin cleared a nervous throat. "Sir," he began respectfully——

"To be sure," took up Mr. Arimondo, "the sonnets of Raphael! Did you think I had forgotten about them?"

"Oh, no!" they lied in loudest unison.

"Well, then, tell me your side of it. When did you first begin to think of them? To want them?"

They could scarcely tell him quickly enough. "Two months ago."

"Our wedding night."

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"In the bungalow."

"What, really? A wedding night? And in the bungalow? You talked of it there? In my bungalow?"

"Oh, again and again," told Jiminy, "until we could speak or dream of nothing else. We tried our best to hide it from each other—but it was useless. Even here in the city the ambition to possess it, to hold it to our hearts, to read it together and so come to know . . ."

Benjamin must finish it for her: "To know what love is, and all art and life through art. The whim of it became a wish, the wish throbbed at our wrists and pounded in our temples. We should never have given up searching, saving—" he looked up pleadingly at the great bookman. "We have already saved a little, sir."

This time, however, when Mr. Arimondo shook his head it was with a far different meaning. "You will pay me nothing. Listen: The sonnets of Raphael are your birthright and,"—turning to Jiminy—"your marriage portion. Did you never realize that you are of the family of Reni? Did no one ever tell you?"

"My father," said Benjamin, bewildered, "was an artist and a great lover of Raphael. It was he who first told me of the lost sonnets—but he knew



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nothing of them. It was the same, I remember he said, with my grandfather. He only knew for certain that we were the last descendants of the Reni of Bologna——”

“Guido Reni! Yes, Guido Reni! Doesn’t that mean anything to you, even in ancestorless America? Why, even Browning could have told you!”

The young couple took to downcast and uneasy looks. It was the Browning, they remembered, which had started all their sharing of the dream and the business . . . the Browning passage and the little steel engraving of La Fornarina . . . but it had been their wedding night, and no very suitable time for recognizing and debating names of ancestors, even had they noticed them.

Of a sudden, now, came the flash to Jiminy, lover of the major poets, and she fell into rapid, excitable recitation:

“You and I will never read the volume.
Guido Reni, like his own eye’s apple
Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
Cried, and the world cried too, ‘Ours the treasure!’
Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.”

“Benjamin, Benjamin,” she cried, “don’t you see the answer?”

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But Benjamin's jaw was too low and his tongue too thick to say, and a benign Arimondo reached utterance before him. "The answer is this, my dear children: that the sonnets will be in your hands within one day."

Here was something for Benjamin's immediate comprehension. "What! You will give them to us?"

"I have been waiting thirty years to find you and give you them."

2

Mr. and Mrs. Reni made efforts to return to the chaste refreshment of milk and crackers. All was honey and ambrosia, however, in their mouths and nostrils. Marvel marched in their sight, its banners blotting out the sense of day.

"The story of how I discovered them," resumed Mr. Arimondo, "is so long that I can tell you only the least part of it. It is, too, so strange and . . . and so personal—it was many years ago, my dears—that I doubt you will ever be able to guess the rest."

"So be content with this: that Raphael, in charge of great architectural schemes on His Holiness's behalf, had to have dwelling places in va-

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rious quarters of Rome. When he died he left each of them to a different friend. On the walls of one of them—a small, poorly different place from the famous palace which he willed to the Cardinal Bibiena—is still daubed the legend that here lived Margarita, donna of Raphael. This house no man inherited. It fell into ruin; mice ran the stairs unheeded; spiders overspread the tapestries, and soot filled the superb carvings everywhere.

"A few years later—after Margarita had been committed to an almshouse, there to die of ceaseless grieving—a Siennese family, loaded with bambini and baking ovens, crossed the Tiber to move into this house. They were, they said, the father, the brothers and sisters of the beautiful donna. No one protested them: the place was worthless, even for the shop they made of it. More bambini—the place swarmed with grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren of Luigi, the old baker of Sienna.

"Then a fire, and a hideous rebuilding into a typical Italian tenement. Nothing was left of the original house excepting that one wall of the daubed legend. Which, when they saw, the men of the family of Luigi would make haste to spit at . . . and the women, nursing their everlasting

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babies on the stairs, would shudder as they passed, and pray for the innocence of their infants.

"In this house, then, in the year 1888, there lived and bloomed . . . oh, tut, tut. . . ." Mr. Arimondo had finished his portion and sat gazing down into the bluish bottom of his glass. "Well, that's another story. And I promised to be brief.

"I had come to Rome in 1888 at a time when a great stir was abroad for the finding of the famous lost sonnets of Raphael. I came with my little Sancho, and we talked so much of it that he swore he should have the means, within three months, of finding them. The stir died down in a third of that time, but I, stark mad upon the hunt, went on searching independently in every possible cranny. I even hired and rummaged a small house near Santa Cecilia, on the other side of the Tiber: No. 20, it was, in the street of Santa Dorotea . . . the house, they say, in whose garden Raphael first saw and fell in love with Margarita, as she bathed her feet in the fountain. Romantic enough and exquisite little earthenware decorations on the window frames, which had lasted down the centuries. But there was no trace of sonnets hereabout.

"True to his word, however, it was my ready Sancho who finally found them. Or found the



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. . . person, rather, who delivered them to us. They were in the wall of that other house—the house which had once been the house of the love of Raphael and his donna and which now swarmed with the poor descendants of old Luigi, baker of Sienna.

"They were in that very wall of the daubed legend: the only wall the fire had left standing. They were hidden there undoubtedly by old Luigi or one of his sons a little while after they came to take possession. They had fawned upon Raphael while he lived; now that he was dead and no further profitable, the scabby lot of them set up house in his belongings and cursed the disgrace of his and Margarita's lawless union.

"The sonnets . . . perhaps the sonnets told too much . . . were Raphael's glorification of La Fornarina's sin and their own family shame. So one of them had loitered under the arcades of Bologna, haunting the street where Guido Reni had his house. And on Guido Reni's dying day, perhaps, he stole them. By the time Bologna knew its loss, he was back in Rome.

"Back, with the glories of Raphael's passion tucked between his filthy shirt and hairy belly. Back to that place of spiders, mice and brawling babies, where old Luigi, with his warty baker's

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thumb, took the book of his disgrace and sealed it shut, forever shut, with strings and smeary clots of wax. They tore a hole for it then, put it in and walled it up again. The honor of the oven was saved. Margarita died in her far-away alms-house, and all the rest of old Luigi's brood lived on in her house, spat upon its wall and cursed the secret thing it held. For centuries the Italian Government searched, offered rewards, published gazettes and official hypotheses. No one ever thought of that house where the daughters of Luigi suckled their sons to a mysterious hate and shame, never to be betrayed. . . .

"That is all, I think. There's the story, of course, of how I managed to secure them. . . ."

"But now," prompted Jiminy, "they're in America?"

"We brought them with us, Sancho and I, under the noses of their customs officials. I never dared break the old Luigi's seal, however. You will be the first to read and know them in four centuries. I do not care . . . I am no longer young."

"Tell us," cried a bursting Benjamin, "tell us where they are!"

Mr. Arimondo reached in his pocket for a key-

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ring. "Here," he said, detaching it, "is my duplicate key to the Nazareth bungalow."

"The bungalow!"

"There?"

"Yes, there . . . the scene of your wedding night, and where you first fell to dreaming that they might be found! There, in the bungalow. There they were, all the while you whispered and despaired of them. Can you think of a safer, decenter place for them? Directly behind the small steel engraving of Margarita herself . . . set into the fireplace. Go find them. Go take them . . . and my blessings besides."



CHAPTER NINE

If one and every raindrop
Were meant to be a pearl,
Then I should be a duchess
And you should be an earl:
For there is rain upon your cheek
And rain adown your nose,
And in the field the flowers yield
Whole caskets, I suppose.

—From the *Little Rhymes, etc., of*
JENNIE RAFTERY RENL



CHAPTER NINE

1

THEY waited only to see Mr. Arimondo seated at his large desk in the outer room, metamorphosed into that great, disinterested heat and energy of the American business man. He was once more the admirable cynosure, the blazing chief amidst his satellite bronzes and steel safes. And the big gray bank of secretaries ranged again to either side of him, lifting him into the high heaven of orders and dictations.

He barely noticed them sufficiently now to nod to them as they passed out through his universe of books; but Benjamin Benvenuto, last of the long sought line of Reni, strode from his presence with such elation that nods and farewells were further needless. Jiminy, feeling the occasion

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for some show of gratitude, lingered in the big, embattled shop through which they must pass to the street, and purchased there, with much of their accumulated mite, the richest possible leather-back of the collected poems of Robert Browning.

Forty-something Street, as they traversed it, was unbelievably inhabited by figures from the omnipresent romance: trousers and skirts of passing sobriety became for them a spectacle of doublet and hose, of bodices, jewels in profusion and all the brave colors of the Renaissance. Limousines twisting among trucks had been instantaneously touched into palanquins and gilded litters. Shops were bazaars of merchants from Genoa and Venice. Office buildings dazzled into palaces. It was become a street of Raphael's Rome. Under a portico an old beggar had a villainous face, and Benjamin, easing his conscience with a few coppers, called out to him: "Hail, old Luigi!" and both of them laughed enormously at that. "Remember me kindly to all your sons and daughters!"

When they were home again in Fifty-fourth Street, they packed a few necessaries: they would be gone only a night and a day, they planned; the evening train left at eight, would arrive in Nazareth early the next morning. Their busi-

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ness there was going to be short. No lingering—they would be back in New York by the following dusk.

They sat about for as long as they could, balking at the creep of the hours. Benjamin sometimes paced the floor in eloquence and pride. Mr. Wimple interrupted one such march when he arrived home from the office and had climbed to visit them.

"Excuse me. I hope I'm not interrupting."

"No. Come on in, you good old Weenie. Suppose you wonder why I wasn't at the office today."

"Well, that's what I—yes, I . . . yes. Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Oh, no," cried Jiminy, coming up from out of the de luxe pages of the new Browning. "All's right with the world. Right at last!"

"Very important business," explained a gracious Benjamin. "We're walking at last in the footsteps of Raphael and La Fornarina!"

"There now, that's just what I told Julie!"

"Did you?" Jiminy suppressed her frown. "Not that it matters, I suppose."

"Matters? Why, Julie is the soul of sympathy. A splendid type, Julie . . . loves you two youngsters. She told me so herself. And

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. . . I had to tell her something . . . you know . . . to explain that painful incident of the picture." He pointed to the disputed print on the wall.

Then he saw Benjamin's old army haversack sprawling with handkerchiefs and toothbrushes. "Oh, pardon me, I didn't know . . . am I in the way?"

They told him, a little grudgingly, the where and when of the journey. Neither of them was bold enough to say just why, however, they were going. They jested of it merrily, kindling and extravagant. Mr. Wimple merely grew the sadder.

"I shall miss you," he confided, "even if only for a day. Your room is so pleasant . . . books and things, you know . . . and the feminine touch!" He sighed. "Well, I shall use your absence well. I . . . I shall work on my drama." He looked around fearfully to see how stupendous an announcement they thought it. "Did you know that I am writing a tragedy . . . in blank verse? It's high time I emancipated myself from the . . . from that awful children's . . . well, you understand, Mrs. Reni. I know you do."

Jiminy shook her head gravely. "I think I do,

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Mr. Wimple. Tell us, a real tragedy? What is the name of it to be?"

"I'm not positive," he replied, the Marechal in him forcing a blushful hesitation. "The . . . 'The Blooming Pomegranate.' "

Having told it, he glanced around even more timorously for the effect. "I'm not sure . . . possibly just 'The Pomegranate' . . . 'blooming' is such a . . . well, so open to criticism, you know. 'Blossoming' . . . 'budding' . . . I've thought of them, of course, but they . . . they don't exactly fit the . . . the case. She's past . . . just a little past that age, you see."

Benjamin Benvenuto, having lived with Wimble long enough to know him, said simply, "Oh!"

"No cheap claptrap," he assured them, "but . . . plenty of poetry."

"Who?" asked Benjamin. "She?"

"Oh . . . oh, no! It. Five acts. I've almost finished . . . the opening scene, that is."

He stayed on with them until it was high time for their departure. He walked downtown with them and across to the Grand Central, a babbling, wistful tag to the silence of their elation. They had a meal for three in a lunch room opposite the depot, Wimple watching them across the enam-

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eled, coffee-streaked table, and wondering at the large amount they ate.

"Pardon me," he remonstrated, "but . . . warm weather for all that sort of stuff!"

"You're pardoned," said Benjamin between mouthfuls, "but it's our first real meal to-day. We had very little lunch." Whereupon he and Jiminy smiled into each other's eyes and Mr. Wimple, suffering further pangs of loneliness, went in for further talk:

"It's his stomach, you know, which disciplines a man . . . a literary man . . . to middle age. At forty his chief food is indigestion tablets."

"At sixty, Mr. Wimple, milk and soda biscuits!" And once more they smiled him away.

They bade him good-by at the station ticket-windows. Jiminy had a glimpse of him later, standing afar off and solitary in the crowds of the marble stairway, his glasses thrust upon his large and upraised nose to search them out in a sheer anguish of benevolence.

Benjamin Benvenuto tried hard to grumble because all possible berths were taken. Jiminy knew, though, he was privately glad of it. It was in the day coach that each of them had separately come, that other time, to Nazareth. Why should

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it be different, now, when they were together and had each the other's shoulder?

When they were in the train, too, and reminiscence of that former trip had lost its race with the lights and darkening streets their window passed, Jiminy was mischievous enough to open and cut further pages of one Robert Browning. The new volume it was: the one aromatic of rich leather, gilt top and Daniel Arimondo, Inc.

When they stopped reading him (and have no doubt but that a certain passage from the "Men and Women" postscript was oftentimes softly repeated) they were deep into the fields and woods beyond Connecticut. Blackness besieged the window now. A low star held the center of the pane a moment; then was gone behind its cloud. Village lights failed them in a gathering murk. Sometimes a pale bursting of the sky into blue rebellion told them of distant lightning, and gave them a momentary outline of trees besides the tracks.

Towards morning, as they drowsed, the first drops of rain hit and darted down the glass. When they awoke they looked out through heavy films of water upon a landscape of hills which ran with a swollen teeming. The roofs of wayside stations poured continuous gurges down on muddy plat-

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forms; the furrows of the fields behind them were bursting and dissolving into a brown, weedy bog; brooks brawled beneath their trestles with new fury. Day came into its poor own behind gray curtains of a rain which would not end for hours more.

2

They alighted, at Nazareth, into a sludge of dismal trees and roads which festered with impromptu gutters. The village green was a parody of pools where little torn branches came slumping on the winds to drown in the wallow of old gravel paths. The distant mountains were not even to be guessed: gray gusts lurched down their slopes and were the only messengers of their banishment. For a small, dark while could Mr. and Mrs. Reni, holders of a key to earthly paradise, sit beside the counter in the general store and content themselves with a breakfast of cold, damp odds. The lad who once had waited on them, they remembered, passed in and out a number of times, the storm leaping over his shoulders to drench the room whenever he opened the door, his boots and oilskins leaving sluttish tracks among the crates and barrels. He did not recognize them; and his

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father, behind the counter, looked suspiciously at their sopping, city clothes and tired faces.

They never minded him, however, and went on chuckling in most meaningless ways: at the howl of winds in the chimney, for instance, and at the pulpy ruin of a book which the young lady tried to dry above the open stove.

"There'll be poetry enough!" he heard her boast to the young man. To which more laughter responded, and a light heartedness which bore them out again into the rain.

They passed the house of the old judge. His porch steps were awash, his window sills dripping; the open barn door in the rear was filled by a wagon of drenched hay.

"Youth, youth!" cried Benjamin Benvenuto, and puffed his lips to blow so hard that the stream from the rim of his hat became a spray.

Through ruts and puddles, with the sting and spill forever on their hands and faces, they were finally upon the bungalow's hill. As they climbed they sang for courage's sake, and would not notice the birches, a soiled set, or how the elms dangled their thrashed twigs; or how, below them, the fields of the harvest had rusted and split beneath the torrent.

Then the bungalow, through a blobber of squall

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and flying leaves. The grain which formerly surrounded it had been cut away, to leave a stubble now all drowned in obscene mire. They came upon the porch through a sheet of drippings, and stood beneath its leaks a moment to survey the stretch which the moonlight of spring evenings had so often given them.

"It's a sorry world," said Jiminy, "but it's ours!"

"Here," replied Benjamin Benvenuto, "is the key to it."

Inside, dampness was added to the pricking quiet of a vacant house. Jiminy would have liked a small fire in the grate, not so much to warm themselves as to bring back some flash of gold from the unpainted walls, some answer of cheer from the crimson curtains. But Benjamin was all for their business and its swift dispatching.

"We'll know at last," cried he, "what lies behind the eyes of Margarita, Donna Velata, La Fornarina of Raphael!" And having paid her all her entitled respects, he got upon a chair and lifted the engraving of that lady from its fireplace vantage.

The bricks of this uncovered rectangle were outlined with a vastly whiter plaster than that old mortar which bound the rest of the fireplace.

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Even Jiminy, from her breathless place on the floor, could notice it.

"Naturally enough," explained Benjamin wisely. "Dust. . . ." He had his penknife out and open, now, and was prepared for a stern hacking at these interstices.

But the blade sank too easily into the plaster; dug completely into it without opposition. He pulled it out with a gasp. He pressed his thumb to the plaster, and saw that it took the impression minutely.

"This stuff is soft," he whispered. "Absolutely fresh."

Panic poured down over the eaves and whistled through the shutters of the house. Mad little fears rushed spattering against the windows and down the chimney.

Benjamin went back to the plaster with plucking fingers. The first brick came out almost instantly. A second one, above it, stirred of its own accord, parted from the fresh joining and clattered down. So, too, a third.

Into the gap they left Benjamin thrust both his hands, then brought them back into daylight bearing a flat metal box.

He climbed down from his chair, prying at the jammed lid of the box and trying incoherently to

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tell Jiminy what misgivings he had had. She was at his elbow, prayerful, starry-eyed.

"Hush," she said. "You are coming into your own!"

The cover sprang away. The box was empty. And though they knew it was only the wind, it seemed almost as if the shriek which came now was from the seven little monks upon the mantel piece, so bitter it was and triumphant.



CHAPTER TEN

Of all the fools upon this earth,
I'm sure that few were fools at birth,
But fell to fooldom's ways as slaves
Of a more foolish folk called knaves.

—From the *Little Rhymes*, etc., of
JENNIE RAFTERY RENL.



CHAPTER TEN

I

MR. WIMPLE came back to Fifty-fourth Street along pavements of good intentions. If he were in the spirit—and of course there was no telling if he was in the spirit until he had sat him down at his bedroom table—he might accomplish the whole remainder of his five acts.

Now that the Reni were away he was not ashamed to be disappointed because there was no Julie sitting to the evening's cool on the front steps. He would not have minded sitting there, in his old place, three or four steps down. Just for a few minutes, of course: he was bound to reach his room in time to write, well, at least a few more scenes. He sat there alone, in fact, a little while, relishing the unexpected breezes

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which came down from Sixth Avenue, until the first drops of rain sent passersby hurrying for shelter in the garage doors across the way and flecked Julie's stone stoop with discomfort.

He wondered how prolonged a shower it would be, and whether it would spread into the country, up into the mountains. It saddened him to think of Benjamin and Jiminy overtaken by a storm . . . so much so, that he began to doubt whether he were in the right spirit for creative work. Well, anyhow, he should succeed in a scene, or merely in tinkering with the one he had already almost finished . . . and so he took his dismissal from the rain.

But loneliness is a listless master. Mr. Wimple, whose room was second floor front, and whose worktable, between his windows, looked out upon the street, sat for many idle minutes staring at the wetted pavements, listening to a melancholy run of curbstones. "The Pomegranate" bloomed no further than its title page, which he ornamented with slow, aimless curlicues, then let reluctantly alone. For even this dawdling was too strenuous a fight against Mr. Wimple's mood. Certainly he was not at all in the spirit.

As he stared down he could look into the area-way of the house, and though he could not see

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the grilled iron door of the basement could hear it creak open, clang shut. At such a noise high tragedy popped ingloriously out of his endeavors, and he stretched his head across the table to ascertain what manner of man was emerging into the rain.

But he could see only the back of a little fellow who hurried away with his coat collar up and his hat jammed down. Mr. Wimple was not sure that he had not caught, too, the tips of a black mustache protruding to either side of the head; but the man was away and down towards the elevated railroad before he could more than imagine there was something vaguely familiar about him.

So Julie, down in her basement, had been receiving company! Mr. Wimple sighed for the unconventionality of the lower classes. Yet unconventionality spelt freedom—and Mr. Wimple sighed even more deeply. The Marechal in him had never permitted him to call upon Julie in her basement; had never tried to pass beyond the compromise of the front steps. As a matter of fact Julie had never invited him below stairs: a detail which he took as unimportant excepting in so far as it proved that Julie had a sense of the fitness of things, of delicacies and politeness be-

JIMINY.

yond her class. Yet here was Julie, heroine of a projected tragedy of the noblest flavor, entertaining some one not even a gentleman in that mysterious quarter known as her basement. . . . Mr. Wimple knew not who or how or for what reason. Some cousin from the stockyards, perhaps, or a neighboring grocer's clerk or fruit peddler. He shuddered. Julie must be like Caesar's wife—and he was sure, now, that he had seen this fellow come time and again in or out of Julie's basement.

The few scratched, labored sheets which represented the present state of "The Blooming Pomegranate" went into the static doubt of Mr. Wimple's table drawer. There they would keep company with laundry lists, newspaper clippings, a scatter of wholly impersonal letters from ladies long since married, a rusty nail file, a few stray, crippled and half emptied cigarettes, and many other pages of many other dramas, essays and romances in the same state of forsaken incipiency. Wimple had never been long enough in the mood to finish one of them. It was a graveyard of Marechal's hopes which Weenie locked up for the night.

The stillness of the house and the complaining rain were leagued against his loneliness. Had the

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Renis been here . . . but the Renis were riding afar, through heaven only knew what cloud-bursts. He felt as he had felt in those first few months after Benjamin Benvenuto had gone off to war: those months which had allowed him to tie himself to the disorderly apron strings of Mme. Julie.

2

He began again to ruminate upon the basement. It seemed so outrageous a reversion of all order that so splendid a creature should live down there, underneath the feet of all her tenants, in a darkness visited only by the milkman, the butcher's boy . . . and by some strange little man of mustaches who might come and go as he slyly pleased.

Then there resounded such a slow, solid creaking on the stairs outside his door that Mr. Wimble knew at once who climbed them. It was Julie going her regular evening rounds of collecting soiled linen and switching on the hall lights.

He heard her reach his landing, traverse it and mount to the higher one. He had met her so often at these tasks that he could follow and explain each footstep, could estimate to the frac-

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tion of a second the duration of each little chore to which her opulence must lend itself. He knew precisely when, by taking up his hat and going out, he would meet her returning to his landing with all the effect of accident.

To-night, however, she seemed to be lingering a moment longer than usual on the top floor—in the rearward portion of that floor, he judged by the particular creak of it. He had to think of her strange behavior towards the Renis: her persistent eavesdroppings, and that of the unknown man whom he had almost caught at their very door, the evening of their arrival. Julie's tread above him came now from somewhere other than the hall; he suspected that she had gone on into the Renis' room. But why? There were no dishes to clear away, to-night. Nor any other excuse excepting their absence, of which Julie had no special right to be aware.

But soon enough she was in the hall again, on the stairs and coming down to Mr. Wimple's landing. He forgot his hat and pretext, threw open his door and confronted her. The lights of his room sprang over his shoulder to paint her face and to confuse her last few steps before she was descended to his level. She gave a little

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squeal; her bag of soiled linen somersaulted down the steps ahead of her.

"How beautiful she looks!" thought Mr. Wimble, and let it lie there between them for an enraptured space.

Julie's hands went the rounds of her hips, then came up to the fluttering plenty of her bosom. But her eyes remained lazy with amusement.

"Ah, Meester Weemple, you frighten me!"

Mr. Wimble, thrilled to action, pounced upon the fallen linens.

"My dear Madame," said he, "that was far from my friendly purpose. Will you not allow me to carry this large . . . this weighty package down for you?"

Madame laughed long. Her laugh was a wicked spur to Wimble, whose arms the load must have tried to their utmost.

"I will carry it!" he boasted. "And all the way to your basement!"

Throughout that downward journey he was immensely satisfied with his cunning. The performance of such a menial rite would give Weenie an entrance into nether regions on whose boundaries Marechal could never deign to linger. And throughout that journey, in turn, the rotund Julie laughed.

JIMINY

In the basement there was darkness. At the foot of the stairs Julie bumped past him to light the passage.

"Give me!" she said, holding out her arms for the bundle in an unmistakable way of dismissing him. "Thank you."

But Wimple hugged his large ticket of admittance the tighter. His boldness was almost uprooted by an assailing mixture of odors: that of strong soap and food from the kitchen in the rear, of stale air, linoleum and feminine intimacies.

Julie stood watching him, blocking the passage. He must express himself somehow. . . . "Madame Julie," he said, chagrined at himself because his tone could not command more mastery,—"Madame Julie, just a few minutes . . . I am very lonely . . . I will be very good, if you will . . . if I may only sit and visit you a while . . . very lonely. Please, Madame Julie!"

She considered him and found him honorable. But it was growing late.

"I know. . . ." he pleaded on. "Never before . . . and not the correct thing to do. . . . But it was very dreary upstairs, Madame Julie, and when I saw that other man. . . ."

"Eh! What other man?"

JIMINY

"Mustaches . . . I saw him come out . . . oh, please, don't think I was rude or . . ."

Julie's eyes stabbed at his tremulous Adam's apple. Her little white teeth bit into her rich, red lip. But when at length she spoke it was with a softness equal to caresses.

"You mus' never tell about thees man, Meester Weemple." She unbarred a doubtful way for him. "You come into keetchen a leetle while if you like. Only you never, never tell about thees man come here." She seemed to take his promise grimly for granted.

It was not a tidy kitchen; but Wimple was unacquainted with your modern spotlessness of tiles and white enamel, and he was enchanted by a string of red peppers which glowed like lanterns against the rainy window. He sat himself shyly upon the edge of a deal chair, as far as possible away from the sink, whence, despite the running of the faucets, all the odors of the place were concentrated into a hot breath of garlic.

Among her virtues—and doubtless she possessed them—Julie did not count that of easy conversation. Nor could Mr. Wimple, whose fingers typed whole fervent declarations on his knees, come to more than a few cramped evidences of uneasiness.

JIMINY

"I have not seen you on the front stoop for many evenings, Madame Julie," he experimented. "Pardon the . . . the personal nature . . . What do you do with those peppers, there?"

The wrath of a Juno was a curse, remember, upon all ancient mythology. Julie grasped a dish towel by both ends and let it belly and sink several times before her face in an effort to cool herself. Across pots and crusted cutlery which strewed the oilcloth of the kitchen table, she examined him as if to wonder how so poor a fly had come into her net.

"Thees peppers?" she replied, smiling beautifully. "I t'ink he is to mix with your heart, which I cut out and make into leetle hash, if you ever tell you see thees man here to-night!"

He almost sprang from his seat. "Julie! I . . . Pardon me, I mean Madame Julie! Ha, ha, that's very funny, is it not?"

"Ha, ha, ees eet not?" She shrugged her shoulders, turned completely from him and devoted herself to the kitchen sink as if he were out of sight or hearing, two flights overhead.

She had a barbarous little sink brush which she plied so heavily that it rasped and snarled in positive savagery. From under its bristles' scrap-

JIMINY

ing the smell of garlic spurted up to claw at Wimble's nostrils.

He shuddered. The Weenie in him must have confessed to fear. The Marechal was aroused to a sudden loathing and disgust. As she leaned to her work he had a view only of her big, bunched back, and of heels run down to slattern slant. The Renis were right . . . she was fat. And old . . . well, youngishly old, with the dark, hurried middle age of many Italian women. And he had been fool enough to tell the Renis she was the image of a Raphael painting!

Once, though, when she turned about to look at him and smile, he knew that he had been correct enough in that. The resemblance was there . . . ugh, Madonna of the Sink Brush . . . and he shuddered so hard, this time, that his chair pushed back against the washtubs which lined his side of the room.

3

He felt, if he did not say something, his Adam's apple would pop altogether loose of its taut surroundings.

"Mr. and Mrs. Reni have gone out of town for the night," he told her.

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Julie did not turn round; stopped only a moment. "Ees eet so?" she replied carelessly, and went on again with her scrubbing.

It was as if she were trying hard to appear surprised; but she did not bother to ask him where they had gone, or how or why. He remembered then that whatever information had been given him on the subject had come in confidence, and was relieved that she did not ask him for it.

Julie jabbed ahead with her vicious instrument. Mr. Wimple was silent again and allowed his typing hands to slump away to his sides. They were uncomfortable there, however, and he raised one of them to rest it, instead, along the edge of one of the washtubs.

On the cover of that washtub, when they entered, Julie had dumped out all the collected linen of his carrying. She had made straight for that spot, emptied the bag precisely there. He had thought then that it was merely for the convenience of to-morrow morning's washing.

His fingers, tired from so much imaginary exercise, found a delicious coolness in the soft heap. He buried them deeper and deeper, and came to the board of the tub's cover. He chanced to move them an inch—and something suddenly

JIMINY

pricked them. Something of metal, sharply pointed.

He thought of Julie's joke about having his heart to eat . . . and he trembled. He wanted to slip his hand out from under the mound now, but did not dare . . . he must find out.

He spread his fingers across the flat of the metal, and found it broader than any possible poignard. He discovered the edges of it, then the outline, then a wooden handle—and by pressing on this handle, tilted the blade until he could encounter the shape of it and know its purpose. It was a mason's trowel.

He was warily contemptuous now. Was Julie's man of mystery nothing but a brick-layer?

Then, as he let go the trowel he realized that it was not lying directly on the boards. Something elevated it an inch or so above the tub cover . . . something soft yet brittle, damp, smooth, of a texture to which his touch could not at first accommodate itself.

He had the edges of the thing, now, and knew it for something rectangular, compressed into light, yielding layers. Leaves of paper . . . he tried one of them between two fingernails, and, though it yielded a little, could feel how it held whole. It was too stout for pulp, for newsprint

JIMINY

or any of those common textures, too soft to be a mere hoarding of wrapping paper.

He had his eyes on Julie's back, all this while. Once, when she turned around, he whipped his hand out from under cover only a trice too soon to be caught.

Immediately afterwards, though, he was groping back into the mound. It was a purposeless game, no doubt. Something whispered to him of the danger of it . . . and something even more indefinite told him to go on. For the first time in his life he was grateful that his fingers were so long and slender, their sense so delicate.

This time he touched the back of the thing, and knew it for a book. He knew, too, what the leaves of it were: parchment, he was sure. There had never been texture such as this under his hand since a certain commencement exercise, very long ago, had brought him his diploma. . . . Yes, it was parchment, but damp. A book. An old sheaf . . . he must get it out!

There were hard, upraised blots on the parchment. A cord went out from them and bound it tightly. He crooked his fingers to this cord and began slowly to pull towards him. The mound of clothes heaved slightly with volcanic disturbance, slight ripples running the soiled peak of it.

JIMINY

The trowel came a little way with its pedestal, buried its point into a stratum of hidden linen and went down with a dead knock to the wooden cover.

Mr. Wimple kept affrighted eyes on Julie's back. This time she did not even look around; had heard nothing. He grasped the parchment boldly, pulled it out into the open.

He had time only to see upon its cover a faded scroll which read: "Sanzio ad Reni" . . . whatever else some hand had printed there was obliterated by the back spittle of a seal which held the volume tied. He thrust it into his coat.

" . . . ad Reni!" That was what smote upon his understanding—that and naught else. The book, whatever it was, had a name upon it which was Benjamin's own name. Why, then, it must belong to Benjamin!

Julie had taken it from their room, he thought at first. But no, it was wet . . . probably with rain. The little fellow with the mustaches had brought it. Perhaps, then, it wasn't really Benjamin's. And he ought to put it back. . . .

Julie had finished with her kitchen sink. She yawned the uncovered, unshamed yawn of the lower classes. But when she turned about towards Mr. Wimple her mouth was closed once

JIMINY

more, and very beautiful . . . the mouth a Raphael might have painted.

Mr. Wimple toyed with the buttons of his coat, hesitated, then slowly brought the button-holes over and closed his theft against his heart.

"My dear Madame Julie," he said to her, "I presume this is the . . . the proper moment to say good-night."

Madame Julie, about to yawn again, broke into another of those laughs which proved she found him comical and harmless.

He rose and, pressing his hand against his heart, kept it there with an excessive care. "It has been an idle hour . . . but I have gained a little just in sitting here and watching you."

"Good-night, Meester Weemple."

As he climbed upstairs again he realized that, for the second time in only a few months, he had had to make use of an arrogant duplicity. The first time, he remembered bitterly, had been in Julie's defense.

Now he had stolen from her, lied to her—and, by the nature of crime, would hate her evermore.

When he was intrenched in his own room he pulled out the volume and stood looking down at the damp translucence of its parchment:

"Sanzio ad Reni" . . . then, below it, some

JIMINY

smaller words, or perhaps a sketch, hideously blotted out by the black wax which drew the old string taut and prohibited any lifting of the leaves.

Who was Sanzio? He did not know or much care. He was nauseated with excitement, homesick for the security of his milder daily business.

One moment of exquisite worldliness he allowed himself, however, before he prepared his thin body for a bed of remorse. "I've righted some strange wrong," swore he, "as sure as my true name is Marechal!"



—



CHAPTER ELEVEN

I know that many little elves
Are playing in the park:
They dance and deck their singing selves
Like robin, rose and lark . . .
And I know how to find them
By creeping soft behind them
On dappled nights and dark.

—From the *Little Rhymes*, etc., of
JENNIE RAFTERY RENI.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

1

MISERY loves company, and worries rush for the free air. At a little before four o'clock of the morning Mr. Wimple rose, reclothed himself in the doggish way of those who have not slept a wink, and wondered what next to do.

Here was the volume, still safe and close to his hand. But unacquainted as he was with household decorum, he did not know when Julie might be clearing her tubs for action, discovering her loss. Even at this feverish, gray minute she might be brooding over a great kitchen knife, waiting the ray of dawn which should accuse his heart.

He was so nervous, now, he must look into

JIMINY

the bureau mirror to assure himself that he was fully dressed. The eyes which stared back at him ached with self-pity; the features surrounding them were pinched with sleeplessness. He could almost have wept, had he not remembered that his one salvation might be silence.

There was no staying here in the house. It had stopped raining out-of-doors; he could at least walk the streets until an hour decent for retreat to his little office at The Newspaper. He had almost passed out of his room when he remembered what he had left behind . . . what, indeed, was driving him out. He went back and found it; placed it once again against his heart and buttoned it tightly down.

He let himself into the hall, where the lights were sallow with long burning, and tiptoed down to the front door. His going was oppressed by the heavy sleep of other tenants. Whimpers and creaks of woodwork waylaid him. His heels on the tiles of the vestibule cracked the stillness like pistol shots. Before he fled down the slippery stoop he glanced into the basement area to make sure that, in that inclosure of shadows and lurching ashcans, no assassin awaited him.

The streets, under their lamps, still gleamed as Mr. Wimple remembered once to have seen

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a big seal's back gleaming when it came up out of its pool in the Aquarium. A pretty simile, he mused, wet streets like sealskin; if ever he broke away from Weenie and his page. . . .

But as he came to the lonely corner of Seventh Avenue he knew that he never would. For when he looked back along Fifty-fourth Street, the flat sides and irregular roofs of it were a chasm to him which suggested immediately a next instalment of some fearful and fascinating fairy tale. And the open door of an all-night garage, in the middle of the block, was the fiery mouth of a great ogre at which a poor, maimed machine snorted and screamed, rushed and retreated to no avail. The mouth widened slowly, its victim passed into it as if drawn by a great, irresistible suck of breath; the iron lips smacked down again across that lighted mouth, with only a thread of greasy smoke escaping them to prove disturbance at the vitals.

Along Seventh Avenue he was the only thing which stirred: he and a pariah cat which rubbed its misery against wet railings, and, when he chirped to it, slunk away with phosphorescent eyes. Behind their grilled glass entrances the halls of apartment houses were dim and hushed. Shops had their blinds down. Only in a little

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stationery store, as he passed it, lights and flickers told him that the morning newspapers were being sorted for the rounds of neighboring flats.

Carnegie Hall's great pile rose totally dark before him. As he went beneath it, the walls of the concert hall gave off big, billed announcements of pianists in fur coats and ethereal effeminacy, famous sopranos in famously low-cut gowns . . . things to be seen and heard next fall. But he avoided Scylla and Charybdis with a shivering disinterest, until he came out upon Fifty-ninth Street, where men and lanterns hovered over mending trolley tracks, making the night so horrible that he knew not where to pursue his further way.

But across these tracks the sidewalk was lost in the silhouette of trees and shrubbery, and gray paths branched out and away to web the greenery of Central Park. After the rain there was a new-found freshness to the things which grew there, a night fragrance recuperated, which pleaded Mr. Wimple's entrance, promised him peace and comfort.

He opened his coat, the better to sniff a first few breaths of this summery perfume. As he did so the book hidden thereunder fell to the gutter with almost no noise. But he had felt the brush

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of it against his knee as it shot down, turned about and came back for it. He looked around excitedly to be sure that no one watched him; leaned, picked it up again, buttoned it back into security, and hurried across into the park.

The lawns, until they stretched away into haze, were healing with dew. Flowering bushes exhaled scents doubly soothing for the quaff they had had of the heavens. The creepy quiet of the streets outside became a hush, here, sanctified to lull and beguile. In front of Mr. Wimple, as he walked, was smoothed out the little pond of the swanboats, so that he had at hand the wonder of all waters in the lighted night.

Here and there, on a bench, he passed sleeping men. Well, prejudices aside, what sweeter place for the rest and revival of a fellow . . . Mr. Wimple did not intend to sleep, of course, when he followed their example and sat down on such a bench. It was damp, but no matter . . . a place to breathe deeply and with reward; to think back upon the happenings of the night in such tranquillity that they no longer terrified him. For there was naught could find him here excepting the blinking glow-worms and their angels (thought he), the fireflies.

When a typical lounger of the park came along

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and slumped beside him on the bench Mr. Wimple was already too heavily pledged to slumber to demur or decamp. He heard the ruffian talking to him about something . . . but from a million miles away . . . heard, then heard no more and was fast asleep.

2

Chill of the dawn awoke him, an hour later, to a painted sky and early bickering of sparrows. His fellow lounger had disappeared, and Mr. Wimple moaned with a new, weary grief on realizing that he had been robbed. His watch and fob were gone, and a small roll of bills from his back pocket.

An old park attendant, prodding at yesterday's litter of the lawns with a stick which had a pointed nail at its end, came by to warn him that the policeman on this beat was known to act very nasty to bums who overslept the night. Mr. Wimple moaned again, crying out against his losses.

The old fellow came within an inch of jabbing his prod through something which lay flat and unnoticed at Mr. Wimple's feet. . . . The pickpocket had not bothered, evidently, to carry it

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off, even to pick it up. But Mr. Wimple did, though no longer with much enthusiasm, and buttoned it back into hiding inside his coat. Then he rose with a morning stiffness and moved on, out of the park by the Sixth Avenue gate.

He was a little cheered by finding a collection of dimes, nickles and pennies—mostly pennies—in a vest pocket which his thief had either scorned or overlooked. He had the warranty, too, of the waking avenue, where the day was bringing out its early carts and a first consignment of shopfolk, who came clattering down from the overhead station.

He was not hungry, but went into the brightness of an all-night restaurant, where he ferried a cup of tea and a plate of crullers back and forth between his armchair and his mouth. The place was awash with its morning swabbing, and the floor engulfed his shoes. He was cross and wanted to rage, but had to remember what was underneath his coat and hold a fretful silence.

When he waded his way to the cashier's slab near the door, he had to take the parchment out and lay it for a moment on the glass cigar case, so that he might reach his vest pocket. Penny by penny he paid out the full amount of the punches on his check; then threw down a reckless

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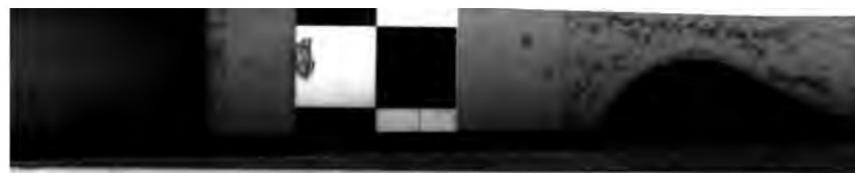
dime, called for a package of cigarettes, got them, tore them open, lighted one at the metal stand opposite, and was almost through the door.

They called him back and asked him if the volume wasn't his. He mumbled his thanks, blushed, took it up again and tore into the street.

He felt like the Ancient Mariner, with his dead albatross weighing forever about his neck. He hurried to climb to the next station ahead and be taken downtown.

But when he arrived at Park Place, and the full moon of the clock on City Hall told him the still foolish hour, he balked again at going so early into his office. So he stayed on Broadway, resuming his march down alleys of buildings where so far only the scrubwomen plied, and where the sidewalks were still piebald with last night's rain.

He came shortly enough to the utter end of the city: to the ferry houses and unshrouding fruit stands which studded the fringes of the Bay. Fog closed out the water and poached so far inland that the statues in the little park, and the squat roundhouse of the Aquarium were shapeless and clammy. He came back across the green to the bulwark of Whitehall, and then along the low dilapidation of Battery Square.



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A small row abutted here of homes of ancient aristocracy, their bottom floors punched out for the installation of maritime employment agencies, dock-hands' lunch rooms, all sorts of supply depots for tramp steamers. In the middle of this row one shop stood back as smaller, shabbier than the rest: one of those shops which prosper darkly by collecting foreign curios from sailors and selling them cheap jewelry in return. From the other side of the street Mr. Wimple could see only a general heap of trays and tarnished brassware in the window.

The mist persisted here, too, and perhaps deluded him into thinking that some one who came out and stood on the doorstep of the shop looked startlingly familiar. It was a little man who had a pair of shoes in one hand, a knife in the other, and who slowly scraped a thick mud from the soles and heels . . . such a mud as never grew in city streets. He had black mustaches. But his head was bent and the mist intervened—and Mr. Wimple flung back and hastily away, telling himself through chattering teeth what an ass he was to find an enemy in every one.

He lectured himself quite aloud, all the way returning to Park Row. He continued doing it throughout the morning, his work so suffering

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from his torpor and his aggravation that even the uncritical ones of the nurseries must have been aware next day, how lame were the adventures of his latest fairy prince, how fuddled the solution to his daily puzzle.

At noon he borrowed a dollar from the millionaire reporter and could call the day complete. But he shrank from going home so early. There was the possibility of meeting Julie on the stairs —the thought of which was awful, now—and the longer he stayed away the more would that chance dwindle.

He dawdled through the hours of the afternoon. There were never longer hours in his life. He trembled before every innocent visitor, blinked fearfully at each shadow which passed his door; stayed on until it was evening again, the office once more deserted.

Only then did he dare take up his burden and return by subway to his room on Fifty-fourth Street. He let himself into the house as breathlessly as he had left it, found no one confronting him and gained the second floor front without suspicion. If his room had been ransacked in his absence, there was no sign of it now.



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3

He took his place by the window, kneeling down so that he might see out without being seen. He waited thus so long that his knee-caps rebelled and his shins grew numb. The traffic along Seventh Avenue thinned down until the policeman at the corner could trundle his "stop-go" sign away for the night. The air dimmed from violet to gray again, then to the blue which calls up the rows of street-lamps. It seemed . . . they would never come.

But come they did at length—such a weary, bedraggled pair of youngsters as never before shuffled homewards from the journey of a mere night and day. Now was the time for it. . . . Now!

He slipped away from the window, out, up the stairs and into their room. He ripped open his coat, took what it held and placed it in full, un-escapable view upon their table. Then out again and down, so that he was in his room and behind his door before they were even up the house steps.

He heard them go past with slow, discouraged tread and no talk at all; heard them reach their room and close themselves in with the failure of their whole mission. He had known where they

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went, but never wholly why . . . and he wondered.

And wondered until his interest in them sent him out upon the stairs again and half-way up, troubled at the pressure of their silence.

Suddenly a cry, a laugh of wild dismay. Then the voices of both of them, so fast, so loud and broken that he could distinguish nothing until they took to a chorus of "Found! Found!"

He must hurry off, now, lest they come out and discover him, and draw from him those explanations which he had sworn, for Julie's sake, and sentiment's sake, he never would want to make. But he listened to their madness for just a few sentences more.

"All art is in it!" came the cry of Benjamin Benvenuto.

"All love," sobbed Jiminy. "All love—always."

So that Mr. Wimple, retiring now with a clear knowledge of what he had found, lost and found again so often in so many silly places, wept in the haven of his room.

All art . . . love eternal. . . . What else had the Marechal in him been struggling to find for forty years? What else could the poor Weenie in him squander from his earthly heritage?



CHAPTER TWELVE

Folk who always watch on high
To learn the secrets of the sky
Will never see or come to know
How golden are the fields below;
Nor, craning upward, ever guess
The nearness of their happiness.

—From the *Little Rhymes*, etc., of
JENNIE RAFTERY RENI.



CHAPTER TWELVE

1

NEVER a moment imagine that either Mr. or Mrs. Reni had courage, that night of wonders, to break the seal and lift the leaves of the sonnets of Raphael.

"Sanzio"—says Benjamin Benvenuto with a scared, worshipful sort of stare at the parchment sheaf which lies on the table between them—"Sanzio! That was Raphael's family name." Then he reads for a tenth or twelfth time: "'Sanzio ad Reni.' There you are, my dear, his own script on the cover—and to Guido, my ancestor!"

Benjamin was very mighty in his ancestry by now. An hour ago, on the train back to New York, he had consigned his whole family tree to

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a region deeper than dungeons; had heartily wished a certain over-imaginative Mr. Arimondo yet further underground.

"Right!" said a rapturous Jiminy, who no longer paid heed to the muddy ruin of her skirt, or to how large a trace of Nazareth roads her heels were imprinting upon Julie's carpet. "Only who—where does it come from?"

That, of course, was their problem. Off they had set with all sorts of secret advices to search a chimneypiece in the faraway mountains—and to find there nothing but mire and storm. Then back again, to the very room whence the circle commenced, to see laid out for them, as plainly as they pleased, the object of the whole exploration. The reward of all their dreaming put suddenly, unexplainably down into their commonest midst, shining there to revolutionize the docile twilight of the topfloor back.

Twice, now, had they come to the bungalow high of hope; twice had they left it in rage against its picturesqueness and surrounding hills. This second time, there had been only a half hour to spare before the return train's leaving; and they had spent that little time in ways that were monstrously useless. They had pried into every drawer, shaken out every book, turned furniture

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bottom up and sounded the planks of the walls in all probable places. A vain proceeding: for they well enough knew that, were their sonnets ever beneath this roof, they were where Mr. Arimondo had located them . . . and now were gone.

Revenge, that bastard son of despair, had his few minutes of struggle with them, too. But what foothold could he gain when there was nothing to give them any hint of enemies or traitors? The mud around the house was trampled enough for conjecture; but the rain had played an impartial and effacing rôle, and they would never know whether the tracks around the porch were their own or a third person's, or even the trademark of a cattle pasturage.

There had been no method, either, in inquiring at the neighboring farm-house. The farmer had a key, of course, but he had not gone into the bungalow since early spring; nor had he seen any other person enter it from the time they locked it shut upon their honeymoon. There might be other keys, true; it was a common lock—or the windows were low to the ground. As for any treasure being stored into the chimneypiece, the honest farmer had opened his mouth wide to the wind and rain.

JIMINY.

2

It was all, perhaps, some machination of Arimondo, Inc. Some last test of their faith, their willingness to climb to the world's end. And then a kinder, more relenting Arimondo—an Arimondo of the old inner office, soda biscuits and the milk of human kindness—might have contrived, somehow, to use their absence to come and have their prize laid out before them, here. If so, it was a jest, a crochet easily forgiven!

Poor Wimple never entered their minds. When he arrived, for that matter, upon his evening call, he chanced to interrupt those pleadings by which Benjamin Benvenuto had almost persuaded his wife that the moment was golden for ripping old Luti's curse from the pages of Raphael. Judge, then, how timely they thought him! How welcome, alas, they must make him!

It is the milder souls, though, which are more often unaware of their intrusion. Nature takes care to buckle such sensitive sons as Wimple into an armor of amiability. He came half longing for their appreciation that it was he who had achieved that sorcery to which their eyes were fastened. But he half feared, too, their scenting

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his connection with things devious downstairs . . . things unheroic and smelling of garlic rather than of the pomegranate.

"Good evening," he stuttered in the doorway. "Just wanted to ask . . . do you happen to know if . . . has the pomegranate any odor?"

"Come in," said Benjamin Benvenuto. "So your tragedy is blooming, is it?"

Mr. Wimple experienced a sudden convulsion. "Not exactly . . . thought better of it while you were gone, my friends, and . . ."

"Of course," agreed an understanding Jiminy. "And you've put it away?"

"Oh, yes . . . with all the others. I did think, though, that this one would be different. A splendid plot, you know, and color . . ." Jiminy's eye was so concerned for him that all the affability went out of his penitence. "You see," he began again, "inspiration depends so much on . . . on inspiration!"

He had been on the point of saying that it depended on the heroine who happened that month to inspire him . . . but he was glad he hadn't gone that far. They would surely have guessed at Julie . . . and something of an idol's mass and majesty must still pertain to Julie, fallen though she was.

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"Besides," he veered, "I missed you youngsters very much. Tell me what you . . . was it a good trip?"

"A very pleasant holiday," said Benjamin.

"The bungalow," said Jiminy, "was more charming than ever."

"Oh!" said Mr. Wimple—then, after an humble pause, continued: "Rained a bit here last night . . . and I was afraid . . . in the mountains, you know. . . ."

"Not a bit!" Benjamin assured him. "I tell you, Weenie, nothing like a little country jaunt to bring one sunshine!"

"And happiness!" Whereupon that blue eye of Jiminy deepened and widened once again while seeking out the old parchment volume which lay innocently there.

Benjamin marked her glance with such a throb of heart that he could not forbear a sermon: "Happiness," he sounded, quite for Jiminy's mysterious benefit, "begins at home. Go out into the fields to search for it; circle the hills for a glimpse. No use! Happiness is waiting all that while in the home you forsook. It is the foundling on every doorstep! Some day, Weenie, you will learn that lesson."

They felt sorry, both of them, because they



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could not share the joy of their surprise with Wimple. Some other year, perhaps, when all the circumstances had been made plain to them, when they had read the sacred pages by themselves so many times that the eye of a third person would no longer be a profanation, they might tell him and give him a generous dip in this elixir of bright hopes. But, in the meanwhile, how could they forget his gross inanities when they first showed him the Fornarina's picture on their wall? His apparent and awkward helplessness in the face of that beloved beauty and her story?

It was his next remarks, in truth, which made them absolutely adamant. For he would not let well enough alone but sat there smiling at them—and at the prize between them, they almost thought—in the gentlest way, typing out a lugubrious continuation of Benjamin's sermon:

"Happiness . . . you are right, dear boy . . . it is the one ungovernable essence . . . I have held it close to my heart one second, picked it up the next one from the gutter."

"Ugh!" said Benjamin Benvenuto.

"Happiness . . . everywhere and nowhere. . . . I have carried it under my coat into parks where the night gleamed and the dawn stole. . . ."

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Jiminy sighed—and he thought her affected by his allegory.

" . . . the dawn stole my purse, my trinkets, and left me my happiness as worthless . . . cast it aside for me to stoop and lift again from under a muddy old bench."

"Yes?" said Benjamin.

"Happiness . . . I have had them thrust it on me across the counter of a cheap little lunch room . . . carried it away with me from my dingy office!"

Jiminy's second sigh ought to have warned him, but he was waxing to a climax which made his fingers fly to keep up with his tongue:

"Happiness . . . where no man hopes to seize it. . . . But I know that you could find it . . . if your hand groped out for it . . . under the piles of dirty linen——"

"Terrible!" cried Benjamin, jumping to his feet and mopping a red brow. "Wimple, old man, you're trampling on—on our feelings!"

Jiminy, too, had risen and taken a bristling stand in front of the table, as if to shield the emblem which lay there from the desecration of Wimple's garrulous allegories. The air was charged with a prayer that he would go away.

But he sat there watching Jiminy, poetess,

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huntrress of happiness, defender of a parchment faith, and was enchanted by her flash of eye, her flushing cheek, the grace and youth of her torment. Why had not Julie been like this . . . why had none of that long list of his been so?

He wondered whether he should not warn them to put the parchment into hiding . . . better still, under lock and key. But, all this while, he was supposed never to have noticed the table or what it bore; there was no way of doing so without engaging their suspicions.

So he left them. Jiminy was in her husband's arms as he went out, and he had only the glimpse of a few fair locks flowering over the rampart of Benjamin Benvenuto's shoulder. He turned about once again before his exit, and said to them something more concerning happiness. Something in his gentlest way to the effect that happiness may lie all night and day at a man's heart without his knowing it until he had . . . "well," said he, "until too late!"

And then, before they had even schooled themselves to listen to a single word of all this last, he was gone.

JIMINY

3

They clung to each other a moment thereafter, each with a hand upon the table, so that their fingers met and interlaced across the big, black seal of old Francesco Luti's hate.

"The time is come," said Benjamin, "to break it."

But Jiminy, a reluctant Eve, only took his hand more tightly into hers. It was not a fear, she knew, nor any sharp presentiment; it was merely that they had come by their fortune too easily, too amazingly. She wanted, perhaps, to wait until the plot were cleared, or until some day more paved with poetry than this one of rain and railroad train, wet fields and blankets of Wimple's homilies. There were years to come, the whole of their lifetime in which the sonnets could be read and turned and read again, until each line of that great hand of Sanzio had forfeited its lover's meaning. Haste would be ungrateful, now, splutter and impatience an insult worse—yes, worse than Wimple!

It was enough for them to stand there, happy at last beyond words or further longing, their twined hands blotting out with love the blot of

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old Luti's black ferment, their cheeks exchanging heat of rapture as they bent their faces to the consecration of Raphael's name and the certainty of Guido Reni's.

Once again, perhaps, Benjamin Benvenuto lifted the volume away, making another of his dramatically mute appeals to Jiminy for her permission to shatter the seal by one short jerk at the wasting old string it fastened. His littlest finger could do it, could fling a paradise wide for them. But there was such a lightness to the book, such a satiny featherweight to the whole compress of pages, that he felt ashamed, as if he had been bullying a dream.

"I think it would blow away in a wind," said he, "or float on any water!" So he gave it compassionately over to Jiminy, who placed it back upon the table.

But though they never touched it more, that night, there must have been a necromancy in its radius. For that night was beautiful beyond all others they had known.

They could gaze at the gray, lack-luster tablet of ancient paper and feel it fill, as did the Grail before Sir Percival, with the glow of a hundred wishes fused into one hope finally fulfilled, a thousand fancies rushing to gleam in that shaft

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of light which was the love of Raphael and his donna . . . and which would now be theirs.

When they raised their shade the sky, which had cleared and was choral with stars, gave them silver fantasies in place of the opposite roofs; the yards below welled with the white fiction of the moon. The blare from the open windows of some dancing academy, two blocks down on the avenue, was filtered for them to the exquisiteness of lutes and viols. All else of noise and modern stir died away into a reverie of midsummer magic, of love highly pleading, beautifully consummated under the Italian skies. Their walls drew off into shadow, their floor was flung with giddiness. Nothing of the topfloor back remained to confront them except the face of Margarita, beautifully beloved . . . she whose print seemed now to fulgurate with welcome and reply to the sonnets her dear master made in her own honor.

Frequently, too, they heard (they could have sworn to it) some old fountain which splashed and told tales to the moon. And from that night to this they've never known that it was only Wimble on the floor below, unusually energetic in his bathtub.

Ah, busy brothers of the daylight, sisters of sense, deride them not! This was their night in

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Rome. This was perhaps the night when art, the major poets and a foolish fate convened among the stars and thought it just and merry to send down to earth a gleaming flake or two of perfect happiness. And one of them fell, no doubt, into a brownstone rooming house and was so honorably shared by the boy and girl who found it that all the clutter there of scribbled paper and shilling sixpence print was lighted until morning with its melting.

But this morning brought a quarrel. For he was all for opening his book of sonnets now, and putting up brusque arguments about his being its hereditary owner; while she was more than ever fearful, tearful, hushing him with the same tale of years and years to come, and nights more beautiful hereafter. So they went out in dudgeon and stiffly, he to his newspaper slab and she upon her errands, leaving the sonnets there unopened, unprotected on the table.

And when they met again that evening in the topfloor back room, the room had been tidied by their faithful Mme. Julie, and the sonnets were gone.





CHAPTER THIRTEEN

All the things of yesterday,
The dolls and broken drums,
The Old Ragman will take them,
And break them, and shake them
 Into his dusty jumble,
When up the street he comes :
All the dreams of yesterday,
The hopes and hearts awry,
The Old Man Time will reap them,
And keep them, and heap them
 Into his timeless tumble,
When he comes passing by. . . .
 Hey, list to his old cart rumble !

—From the *Little Rhymes*, etc., of
JENNIE RAFTERY RENI.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1

THEY were gathered again, a few evenings later, in the topfloor back. To the usual three there was added the great personage of Daniel Arimondo, Inc.

He had forfeited a large banquet and still larger contract at the home of his most gorgeous client to come instantly away and share the woes and bitter bread of Fifty-fourth Street. He had come in the rich way of his own limousine, his entry so impressive that the windows of neighboring houses flashed back reflections of his lights; and even Julie, looking out from her basement, gasped at the greatness of her house's latest visitor and fled the chance of being noticed.

They had him towering over the little table

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upstairs, rumbling with relief because he could exchange that heavy banquet on Fifth Avenue for these few snacks of blameless delicatessen. When Jiminy, who had insisted that the meal and conference be private, went to the sill to fetch his bottle of milk, he was a kind old man again, a very father to them all. Even to Wimple, who sat much afraid of him, teetering nervously, until Mr. Arimondo owned that, often of a noontime, he had sent for the earliest edition of *The News-paper*, to have his secret fling in Fairyland.

He was large for any chair in their collection; liked it better, when the meal was done, to walk a placid path from wall to wall, breaking back rarely into a sudden halt and inquisitorial remark. He had the whole story from them in four questions.

Once, though, while listening to Jiminy's recital of their journey, he had sharp eyes on Wimple, and wheeled about to that meek man with a hurricane violence:

"Well, you sir, Mr. Wimple! What do you know about all this?"

Mr. Wimple nearly perished of his Adam's apple. "I . . . I . . ."

"Allegories," said Benjamin Benvenuto, "are all he knows. No facts——"



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"Oh no . . . no real facts . . . none worth while!" And Wimple had so miserable a look that Mr. Arimondo dismissed him mercifully from suspicion.

"There were three keys," deliberated the great one, "to my bungalow. One I had, and gave to you. One was always with the neighboring farmer. The third——" he paused to smile at the preposterousness of the idea—"No, I never knew what became of the third one. I think that fellow Sancho must have mislaid it somewhere when he was still my butler."

"Could he have kept it?" asked Jiminy.

"What did he look like?" gasped Wimple.

Benjamin was all for packing Weenie out of the conference, he thought him so irrelevant. But Mr. Arimondo humored the question.

"A little chap, very young . . . in those days."

"Had he . . . pardon me . . . a large black mustache?"

"Oh, no, the smallest wisp. He was the usual Italian boy."

Wimple subsided, so uneasy that he dared not ask how many years had intervened to add inches to this Sancho's mustaches.

"Besides," boomed the bookseller, "he never liked the bungalow. He always let me have a few

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Neapolitan oaths before I could drag him away from the city."

So, now that Arimondo had assured them that he had had nothing to do with the sonnets' appearance in their room, they were more than ever at sea; and as for the disappearance . . . it was a dilemma too large for conversation.

Jiminy, a little haggard in her patience and contrition, could only blame herself for not letting Benjamin open the parchment, two evenings ago. Then they would not have quarreled, at any rate—and it seemed to her almost as if the treasure had fled their first harsh word; had vanished from an atmosphere unworthy of its radiance.

Benjamin Benvenuto, if he scourged himself with the same thought, would never admit it. He emptied his rancor on Wimple, and wished him and his gentle worries far away. Why didn't the fool stop fidgeting? What could he possibly know, or tell them, that should admit him into their confidence? The very questions he insisted upon stammering at Arimondo must disqualify him—and Benjamin was gratified at least that they had given him no hint of what lay there on the table, two evenings ago. A fine one, Wimple, to touch or even look upon the sonnets!

JIMINY

Mr. Arimondo had his own thoughts, too, as he resumed his troubled orbit. One step had him musing, the next stern again, the third smiling until his large, bald head wagged heliographic messages of hope; the fourth left him staid again and most impassive.

"Well, young ones," he decided in due turn, "I know that I shall have to send a cable message."

"To where?"

"To Italy."

"To whom?"

"His Excellency, the Minister of Public Arts."

"Why?"

"To confess him the sins of my youth."

"The sonnets, you mean?" demanded Benjamin.

"The sonnets I smuggled from a mooning government in 1888. It is our last resort. What can four baffled humans like us do in comparison with a mighty government?"

"But oh, Mr. Arimondo, that would mean——"

He came and stood over her. "It would mean, Mrs. Reni, that perhaps your husband might be saved a knife thrust at his heart."

Jiminy and Mr. Wimple cried out, but his was the louder utterance because he remembered those threats of the basement.

JIMINY

"The family of old Francesco Luti is everywhere," said Arimondo solemnly. "They are banded in their silence like a sworn camorra."

Wimple's jaws were so active with gulp and gasp, they could scarcely hold his secret any longer.

"I myself, in the year 1888," continued the bookseller, "while on the verge of leaving Rome, ran foul of a member of that estimable family who informed me that my heart would make excellent mince-meat—and actually tried that culinary trick on me."

Wimple's jaws clicked shut.

2

Having sipped a post-dessert tumbler of his milk, Mr. Arimondo walked ahead. "I was very young," said he . . . which Jiminy and Benjamin knew at once to be the start of a new tale of Rome in 1888, when Mr. Arimondo wore a short blonde beard, was a poet, a great lover, nothing as yet of an American business man.

"So young," he persisted, "that nothing mattered in my life excepting sonnets and signorinas. My relish for the first was whetted, you'll re-

JIMINY

member, by the hue and cry then loud in Italy for finding Raphael's to his donna. My love of the second . . . the little girls of Italy! Ah, gentlemen, the dusky little buds with eyes aflame . . . I beg your pardon, my dear!" and he bowed to Jiminy before he sighed: "It was so long ago!

"I had been but a month in Rome, but a week in that small house I hired on the street of Santa Dorotea—No. 20, it was, near Santa Cecilia, on the other side of the Tiber . . . the little house of the earthenware decorations on the window frames, and of a garden in whose fountain pool young Raphael caught his first glimpse of the wading Margarita. I had rummaged there to find the trace of Raphael's sonnets . . . but I was in my twenties, and they were old, centuries old—and the little girls of Italy . . . I beg your pardon, my dear!

"I told you, I think, of that other house. Sancho could have found a queen in beggar's rags—if only she smiled at him—and they all did! He found me that other house . . . the one of the brawling Luti, who overran the stairs and spat upon the wall . . . the little wall left of the original house of Margarita, daughter of old Francesco, who sealed and hid away the book of Raphael.

JIMINY

"It was Sancho who led me there, one morning in the Roman spring, and let me see, from a hidden corner, the mess of bambini crawling in the gutter, the jabber and squall of all the Luti in creation, gathered together in a common tenement to curse the ground they lived on and beget a hundred little Luti every year, to perpetuate the curse, the brawl, the spitting. So here had stood the house of love . . . of Raphael and the highest passion of his art! I sickened at the sight of it, and turned away.

"But I caught, as I turned, the train of Sancho's gaze and followed it back to an upper window of the house—a window strung with the inevitable peppers. And there, peeping out from behind those flashing garlands, there was a young girl . . . a white shawl slipping from her hair, her hand at her breast, her lips rich, her eyes . . . It was the pose, the face. . . . I'll take my oath, it was the very image of—of this!"

He had stopped beneath the print of the Fornarina, raising a face gone wintry before that warmth of color:

"Not of this, though! Not of this execrable little English lithograph! The real Raphael . . . the splendid Donna Velata, as she glows and lives in the gallery of the Pitti! As she glowed

JIMINY

and lived in the flesh for Raphael's brush, four centuries ago!"

There was a short silence, nothing to disturb it except Wimple's increased threshing in his chair.

"In Rome . . . pardon me . . . when one is that age . . . the road to love is royal, and knows no traffic rules. Especially with such as Sancho for postilion. I galloped into an infatuated meeting with my Giulietta, and soon enough——"

"Giulietta!"

"Yes, Mr. Wimple. Is there anything strange to such a name in Italy?"

"Oh, no! I . . . I . . ."

Arimondo forgave the interruption with a reminiscent nod. "She was fifteen, a slender elf only recently daring to come and peer with great black eyes into the pool of womanhood. One night, I remember, at my little house beyond the Tiber, where the walls of the garden were high enough to shut out all the world except the moon, she broke from my arms and laughed to run and wade in the fountain, so that I might see her as Raphael first saw her ancestress, whose face she had, whose hands and silver feet. . . . She seemed that fountain's self, a slim, dark swaying of laughter, of young chatter and white gleam under the

JIMINY

moon. . . . Ah, pardon me, my dear—and all of you. I'm a sentimental old man, underneath."

Mr. Wimple had his head in one hand; the fingers of the other one typed on. None of them noticed him now, Arimondo least of all.

"That was the night she whispered me the secret of the sonnets. Sancho had hinted she knew it, that she could be begged to tell it. . . . He would have the book of them in my hands within three days, he said. I have never known how he found out; perhaps she told him, but she was always sullen with him, silent and hostile when he was near.

"Once I even thought they were in love. Who knows? His merry eyes, his gamin's wit, the little black wisp above his teeth which all the girls of all the quarters found so to their taste. . . . At any rate, he brought me the sonnets, three days later. She had shown him the very spot in the wall where he should loose the bricks and find them. She had done it, he said, to prove her love for me. But perhaps it was because I had promised him the reward of double wages.

"For, when next she crossed the Tiber and came into my garden, she was shivering and pale, with age and anger in her eyes; and while she stood beside me at the fountain, and saw the moon

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there strewn and shattered in its current, she drew suddenly close to me . . . so close that the knife she held beneath her shawl tore through its texture, through my coat and shirt, and the blade was cold and sharp against the flesh just over my heart.

"I shoved her back, and the knife came away with her. She dropped it, and it fell into the fountain. I scooped it out and offered it to her. It lay white in my hand and ran with the drip of water. She looked at it as if she were crazed because the beads on it were not of darker hue; snatched it from my hand and ran away."

Benjamin whistled, Jiminy moaned. There was no sound, this time, from Wimple.

"So there . . . you see, there's the moral of it. I let my little Sancho pack her home to her tenement, where the Luti brood went on spitting at an empty wall, and the screams and the curses were multiplied by generations. Sooner or later the secret of the looting must have leaked; but it was only years after Sancho and I had escaped to America with the sonnets that I learned from my agent in Rome that a Giulietta Luti had disappeared . . . was gone, he could not tell me where. And the years that have gone by . . . they have been many . . . have tormented me

JIMINY

. . . especially at secret noontimes, when I am not altogether a successful business man!"

3

Mr. Wimple let a long pause prevail, in order to be sure the narrative was ended. Then he raised his face and Jiminy almost screamed at its jaundiced tinge.

"In America," he said, "we call her Julie."

"Who? What the devil, sir——"

"Hush! Four evenings ago, I—the sonnets were in her possession."

"Where——"

"How——"

"Three evenings ago they were in this room."

"We all know that!"

"Who put them here? Not Giulietta!"

"I, Marechal Wimple!"

"You, Weenie, you!" cried Benjamin Benvenuto. "And so all that allegory of yours——"

"Was only a part of the facts." He began to hiccup frightfully. "She—she had them hidden on the—the washtubs, under a—a pile of . . . I stole them for—for you."

Jiminy had run to him and taken his hand.

JIMINY

"Oh, you good, brave Marechal!" And no woman since his mother's time had called him that.

"C-c-come, Mr. Arimondo."

"Great Heavens, sir, come where?"

"To meet your—your Giulietta . . . ha, ha! . . . face to face!"

"But, sir——"

"In the basement of this very house . . . perhaps listening . . . right here!"

All four of them were on their feet. They gathered towards the door.

"Why didn't she come for our supper things to-night?" whispered Jiminy.

Then they were out in the hall and making a solemn march down the stairs.

"She's certainly not up here," said Benjamin Benvenuto.

"Nor here," came the deep rumble of Arimondo when he reached the lower landing.

Nor on the one below, nor in the basement, either, when they came into that fastness. They had to make a light there, had to walk about among the kitchen things and into the sour room in front—to find nobody. Nothing of Julie, whatever.

For Julie had fled; had run from the Great Presence which was Arimondo.

JIMINY

They came up to the front hall, a doubly baffled lot who said only curt, dull, casual good-nights to the departing guest.

"Poor children," he said from the vestibule, "you must pay for the sins of my youth. There is only one thing to do, it seems . . . though the sunsets are yours alone. Good night, good night!"

They watched him drive away with steady, boring lights ahead of him, and such a purr of power and perfect mechanism that his limousine seemed the body of his usual large impersonality. Romance had gone with him and rolled the avenues on smooth pneumatic tires.

The three he left behind climbed back again through the house of the absent landlady. They lingered a moment before Wimple's door, Mr. and Mrs. Reni loath to let him go within until they had made some amends, stammered some dismal thanks.

"I am well . . . paid," said he, swallowing his evening's final hiccup. "From now on you must always call me Marechal. Good night . . . let's see what to-morrow brings."

But to-morrow brought nothing, unless it were the short dispatch which came to the evening newspapers, announcing that his Excellency, the



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Minister of Public Arts, was leaving Italy for New York the following morning on his Majesty's warship, *Extravaganza*, upon some unofficial, confidential mission bound.





CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A very grand man with a very grand face,
In robes of velvet and much gold lace—
Oh, whither does he hie him?
Straight to the palace, there to command
In awfullest tones the princess's hand—
And how shall the king deny him?

—From the *Little Rhymes*, etc., of
JENNIE RAFTERY RENI.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1

THERE was argument enough, of course, in even so short an announcement. Conjecture spread beyond the little clique in Fifty-fourth Street; beyond the news sheets, in fact, and took to solemn notices on the daily editorial pages. One paper had it that His Excellency the Minister of Public Arts was coming to compare the Metropolitan Museum with those of his own country; another that he was negotiating the sale of the Roman Coliseum, to be transported brick by brick to some middle-Western city and put up as an athletic stadium for the benefit of an automobile factory's employees. One tirade had him bargaining for the famous art collection of a multimillionaire, but recently demised. A sec-

JIMINY

ond had him investigating our immigration difficulties under cover of art. A third insisted he was coming to force further Italian repertory into the Metropolitan Opera House. A magazine of pacifistic passiveness grew suddenly bellicose at the unexplained intentions of a foreign warship in our harbor. The Italian newspapers came out with special supplements in color, and with the surmise that His Excellency probably carried with him enough crosses of the Order of the Crown to leave a hundred Cavalieri and Commendatori behind him. The Mayor of New York made haste to name committees and sub-committees of frock-coats.

Mr. Arimondo held his peace and tongue. He left his young confessors to their own poor plodding. So, indeed, did Julie. She did not treat for any truce; held her own trench somewhere below the horizon, nor dared to sally back at any time to make the beds or collect the rents in Fifty-fourth Street. Her tenants made shift for themselves a little while, but towards the end of the week the most of them had decamped.

Jiminy, Benjamin and Wimple had the best of reasons for staying on: and stay they did, a sly, sleuthing trio of conspirators who tidied their own rooms, reconnoitered the halls and listened for

JIMINY

any possible clank of the basement gate. Each evening, too, they sprang with hope eternal to go down into that deserted region and renew their search.

If any little man were watching from the shadows on the other side of the street he could not have liked the light which then flared up into the window there below, or these shadows which crossed it in constant business. He could not have had high opinion, either, of the strategy of three who rummaged in full blaze, who clung to this fort by sheer default and were so open with their growls, their tears and groans that no one—Mme. Julie least of all—could come to coax them out. The little man was of a subtler sort than that.

Mr. Wimple, through his unhappy knowledge of a larger number of clews, was almost the trio's leader. For what he lacked in command he made up, no doubt, in kindness and faith. In the blink of a moist eyelash he had forgiven Benjamin all his former disregard; and as for Jiminy. . . . He had taken out "The Pomegranate" again and, in the late evenings, when clews, vain searches and regrets had sent his neighbors up to their discouraged bed, he had his secret tussles with it. Its heroine, marvelous to tell, had shrunk in stature, lightened in color: was a shy, pent

JIMINY

blossom now of golden hair and eyes of heaven's blue . . . and there was a new character inserted into his jesterly personae: a poor old jester who forgave her laughingly, just before he died, for marrying the handsome prince. He was angling for a new name to it all . . . "The Peach Blossom," perhaps, or "The Golden Rose" . . . or better still, a censor compliment, "The American Beauty."

2

That return day arrived when the ship news reporter of *The Newspaper* communicated with the City Press and announced the arrival in port of the Indian cruiser, H.M.S. *Entente*. It was the early afternoon, and Benjamin Benvenuto, with a sense of something foreboding, put so much India Ink where white paint should have been, and so many evils upon photographs which should have been enclosed in squares, that they sent him quickly home.

Mr. Whipple, having found him gone, crumpled his collar points into a pocket and as hastily descended Weeze's corner to the clouds. As he crossed the City Hall plaza towards his subway station the steps of that noble old relic were black



JIMINY

with deputations. Somewhere in the dense crowd a band was playing the Italian national air.

"Poor little last of the Reni!" thought he. "Their temple is tumbling about their ears. Samson Arimondo . . . pshaw!"

The house in Fifty-fourth Street wore indeed an anxious look. A sullen, frowsy and unpeopled look, he thought as he mounted into it, such as idiots wear whose eyes are vacant windows for the peeping of some unintelligible trickery.

He had scarcely closed the hall door behind him when a large, closed hack came into the street from Sixth Avenue, slowed and stopped at the curb directly before the house. He had a glimpse through the curtain of the door's small pane: saw a little man of mustaches, clad in a splendor of court costume—satin knee breeches, cocked hat, a cloak of black velvet with a gold star embedded in the breast of it—saw him on the sidewalk, on the stone steps!

Mr. Wimble could not cry out, as he retreated from the possible view of this ascending apparition. Could not get to the stairs and up them; had opportunity to flash no messages to the top-floor back. He could only retreat into the darkness under the stairs at the back of the hall, crouch there and ease his Adam's apple with the

JIMINY

knowledge that Benjamin Benvenuto was already up there . . . if need be . . . if anything terrible should happen.

The splendid party reached the vestibule, let himself into the house with a latch key, stopped a moment to examine and prink his raiment before the hall mirror, and then continued on his upstairs mission. He had not even noticed the refugee, who heard his dainty footsteps go high and fainter overhead.

Once he was out of sight and sound, Mr. Wimble crammed his hat over his brow, pulled up a cautionary coat collar, came back to the front of the hall, let himself out of it, sped down past a dozing hackman and darted to the corner. A block away a subway kiosk made a gulp at him and swallowed him whole.

3

But even stranger things befell, that moment, in the house of the absent Julie. On the topfloor back a knock at the door: a knock so sharp with authority that Benjamin Benvenuto looked at Jiminy, Jiminy at Benjamin—and before they could go to open it, the door swung open to disclose the splendor there.

JIMINY

"I am," quoth a voice of suave bass tones and foreign accent, "His Excellency, the Italian Minister of Public Arts."

It was a voice of a new doom. It was the voice suited to the white gloved hand which tugged at a ferocity of mustache; to the Disraeli coat, Napoleonic hat, fierce luster of satin breeches and royal ribbons at the breast. The star on the velvet cloak punctuated the announcement with a burst of golden exclamation points.

Benjamin bowed his head. Jiminy tried to look up, but she too failed. The apparition came no further into the room, waited for no acknowledgment of his aristocratic presence.

"You," said he, "are Mr. and Mrs. Reni, holders of a worthless claim to the sonnets written by Raphael Sanzio in the sixteenth century, and now in my possession."

"Worthless?" asked Benjamin, awed.

Already in his possession, thought Jiminy . . . Arimondo had been right in promising that a government could move quickly!

"Do not interrupt me, sir. You succeeded in obtaining false possession of these sonnets. They have been taken from you and held for my arrival. The Italian Government owes thanks for

JIMINY

this long missing treasure to its agent, Giulietta Luti. It will return to Italy with me."

Mme. Julie a government agent! Had all of them, even Arimondo, been such simpletons as never to know that!

"You have been continuing your part in this conspiracy against a foreign government by searching the basement of this house every evening, and by driving all other tenants from their rooms."

"Oh, Your Excellency——"

"Do not interrupt me. The sonnets of Sanzio are now safe with me. You will search for them no more. You will leave this house within an hour. You will take that funny little busybody, Mr. Wimple, with you. None of you will ever again interfere with the good Giulietta."

"Yes, Your Excellency, but——"

"If you do not do these things, the Italian Government knows how to cross the ocean and put you into prison, all of you, for smuggling a valuable manuscript, for hiding it in the mountains, for stealing it from the good Giulietta. It will be very easy." He deigned to smile upon a glowering Benjamin, a Jiminy distracted. "You see, sir, and Madam, I know everything."

JIMINY

"Well then, Your Excellency, you know my rights to——"

"Your rights, rash boy, are founded upon many wrongs. You may be glad to escape them." He buttoned the silk frogs of his cloak. "I have no time to argue with you. Remember, you will leave this house in peace within an hour. Take the little Wimple with you, and never try again to find what belongs in the museums of a great people. These are a government's terms. You will obey them."

Then there was a grand, solemn bow which left them stupefied, and the little splendor turned and strutted off. At the head of the stairs, however, it twisted its mustaches to one more effect, halted and rasped back at them:

"You will also leave your last two weeks' rent on the table behind you when you go!"

4

The tap of his heels died away; they heard the front door close behind him. It had occurred to Jiminy to wonder how he had gained entrance into the house, but she had no heart now for speculations on the omnipotence of foreign governments. She began some low, studied consola-

JIMINY

tion for her Benjamin; he held up his hand, stopped her. She went across to him, came to his shoulder, found the other hand and eased the clenching of its fingers.

"Who knows," she said, "what danger has been lifted from us? We have been fools, perhaps, but we have come out of it whole . . . and hopeful."

"Hopeful? Whole? Jiminy, you're too game to spread that sort of talk as truth." He managed to grin back at her. "Only a Wimple could be hopeful now!"

"Poor Marechal," she sighed, "he is exiled with us. Let's go see if he's come in, and tell him the edict."

But his room was empty, they found, and they thought him still at the office, playing in his elfin ring. The floor was strewn with crumplings of his last night's effort to revivify the blossoms of his drama.

The bell of the front door rang mournfully through the empty house. Rang then again, and once again, and with it such a rapping of a cane against the glass that they gave their attention at last to the summons.

"If that's another envoy of His Majesty——"



JIMINY

growled Benjamin Benvenuto, and doubled his fist once more.

"Hush, dear," said Jiminy, "perhaps they're coming already to evict us."

So down they went to the front hall and found another little man with his nose and mustaches pressed flat against the pane, and making wild motions to them through the door. They opened it cautiously, came out and cornered him in the vestibule. He was smiling, pudgy, incoherent. He wore a suit of traveling tweeds, a wilted collar, tie askew; he was an anxious little bundle of drab shapelessness. He made a few, shrugged tries at English, then launched apologetically into his native Italian and oozed with delight at Benjamin's understanding of it.

"Tell him," pleaded Jiminy, "we haven't had time to pack."

"I will," protested her husband, "if he gives me a chance to talk. He's been blubbering something about meeting Signor Arimondo on the dock and getting our address from him."

There was another stream of purest Roman dialect. The little man seemed frantic to persuade them of something.

"He says," translated Benjamin, "that he had a hard time escaping some committees, to come

JIMINY

up here and meet us and Arimondo. What's that? Oh! He wants the sonnets! Listen to him . . . says he's come for the sonnets!"

"Look!" whispered Jiminy. "Those mustaches! Do you know what I think he is? He's that wicked little Sancho of Mr. Arimondo's! That little scamp of an ex-butler, up to some awful mischief . . . oh, and revenge!"

"I think you're right. Oh, I say, this is too good!"

The pudgy little man was pulling all sorts of papers from his pockets—memoranda, long documents, a scroll with coats of arms and seals—and was imploring Benjamin to read them.

"Do you know what he's trying to tell me he is? The Italian Minister of Public Arts!"

The little man caught a hint of his translated title, and commenced to bow in a relieved elation.

"The cheek of him! The round little cheek of him, Jiminy! Trying to tell us a thing like that! And he wants the sonnets . . . oh, you do, do you . . . *si, si*. . . . Well, little Sancho isn't quite as clever as his ex-master thought! And Sancho wants the sonnets, does he . . . ho, that's a fine affair! Insult to injury! Look at him, Jiminy, swearing by his king and country



JIMINY

that all Italy will honor us if we give up the sonnets! . . . Why, you poor, lying little fool, don't you know that the Italian Minister of Pub——”

Bursting beyond all further invective, Benjamin seized the squealing little bundle of tweeds and flying papers and shoved him out of the vestibule.

“Get out! Go back to your antiques! Minister of Public Arts! Ho! Ho! Hey!”

Accompanying every peal of laughter came the sound of the little man's thump on a lower stone step. He came to the sidewalk on his back, rolled over, shook his broken cane at them and ran hobbling for the street corner.

In twenty seconds he was coming for them again, one policeman at his back and another dashing in from his post a block away. A shrill blast of whistles stopped all automobiles on Seventh Avenue.

All except one, that is, which had already pivoted into Fifty-fourth Street. Mr. Arimondo leaped from his limousine, taking in the turmoil at one beetling glance. The groaning victim rushed to him, threw two torn sleeves around his neck and kissed him on both cheeks.

JIMINY

"Good Lord!" cried Mr. Arimondo. "What have you been doing to His Excellency?"

"Is this . . . but . . . Oh!"

"My dear children, how could you ever——"

"Then who . . . we thought this was your Sancho!"

"What? My ex-butler? What an insult to a mighty government!"

"But who was the other one, then, Mr. Arimondo?"

"What other one?"

"The first Minister of Public Arts? He paid us a visit earlier this afternoon, in the most gorgeous court clothes, and——"

"And he told us he already had the sonnets, and that we must move away. . . . Who was he, tell us?"

"How should I know? Wait . . . what did he look like?"

"Like this . . . like His Excellency here. Only slimmer, wittier, larger mustaches, talked a good English, and the most magnificent clothes——"

"Right! I know! Quick, all of you, jump in. You, too, Your Excellency! Battery Square——"

"What for?"

"For the sonnets. Quick!"



JIMINY

A third policeman had come panting up to pass the other two who stood respectfully to guard the foreign personage in tweeds; he made for the door of the limousine as they seated themselves.

"I want Mr. B. B. Reni."

"Here," said Benjamin. "Take me."

"No. Just a message come into the precinct for you, and they sent me 'round with it."

"Hurry up!" roared Arimondo. "What is it?"

"Man by the name of Wimple, dying from knife thrust in antique shop, Battery Square. Ambulance called—but won't go to hospital before he sees you. Owner of shop and wife held there for identification."

There was a little interim of horror. The limousine's engine snarled and clashed metal on metal, then was ready for the race.

"Wimple!" cried Benjamin.

"He beat us all!" muttered Mr. Arimondo. Then: "Hurry! Battery Square! Hurry, hurry!"



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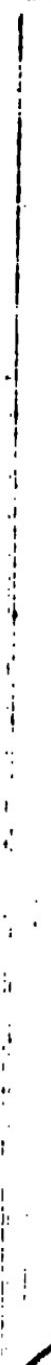
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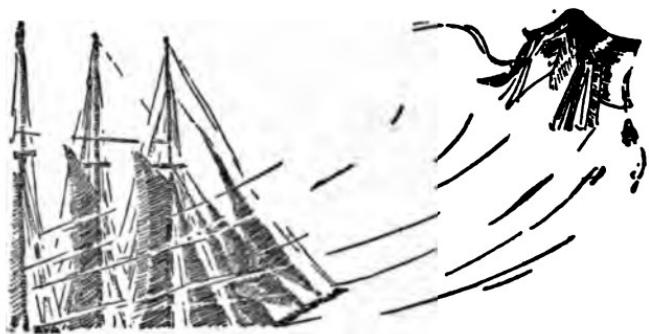
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CHAPTER FIFTEEN





CHAPTER FIFTEEN

To so official and compulsory a report as that from His Excellency the Minister of Public Arts to His Excellency the Minister of Foreign Functions Mrs. Reni is too modest to allow the prelude of another of her little verses. Having lately gone to Rome, and having been confirmed there in the good opinion which she and her husband had of His Excellency (recently promoted, according to The Newspaper, to the post of Minister of the National Funds and Royal Exchequer) she is content with this short extract from his history of an hour in Battery Square. Neither the discrepancies of a foreign viewpoint nor the difficulties of translation can dissuade her from inserting here at least a portion of His Excellency's commentary:

JIMINY

. . . "I shall not attempt, my honored confrere, to weigh my perplexity concerning American hospitality. But having received immediate passage on His Majesty's cruiser only after promising Your Excellency that my errand would engage no embarrassing hostility here, I must endeavor to recall some few of the incidents which marked the climax of this, my first frantic day among a people evidently so perturbed in temperament.

"Your Excellency knows with what lofty purpose I so suddenly undertook this journey: It is not necessary, my dear and confidential friend, to remember the coup inflicted on me by the Grecian government when it succeeded by devious suits in wresting from our proud holding the great marble of Zeus Sicilianus. I likewise disregard the rebuke which came to me from the public press, and then from His Majesty, when I allowed the Duke d'Ostrova to sell his famous Cellini salt cellar to a Swiss hotel proprietor instead of annexing it for exhibition in one of the Roman museums.

"But this much I have learned from public life: that the great tapestry of history is woven with needles of trifling size. Wherefore when I received the amazing message from the well-



JIMINY

known American bookseller, Signor Arimondo (upon whom I would respectfully suggest that His Majesty might be gracious enough to confer the Order of the Crown in a degree sufficiently high to prove the Italian government's appreciation) I perceived that an opportunity was offered as fortunate for Italy as, confidentially speaking, for me. To return to the Italian people a treasure they have whispered of and mourned for centuries, and so sentimental a treasure as the sonnets of Sanzio, must more than repay them for the loss of a Zeus Sicilianus and a Cellini salt cellar. I am confident, as well, that it will recommend me highly to His Majesty's notice, when, if I am not mistaken, a new Conservative cabinet is soon to be formed. Art, my dear confrere, is only a frail little sister in the family of politics; and I remember with gratitude your agreeable suggestion that, should the premiership come into Your Excellency's more than worthy hands, I should possibly have the opportunity of playing with one of the older brothers in that family: The Interior, for instance, or Funds and Exchequer. Unworthy as I am of further honors I am not without hope that this American coup of mine may so please His Majesty and the public press. . . ."

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(Continuing for some few further pages along this diplomatic line, which, however illuminative of modern history, does not light up with any quickened interest the sad plight of Mr. Wimple, His Excellency goes on to describe all those strange things which befell him as soon as he touched America's shore. He attempts something of a Roman rhapsody at first sight of the New York sky-line, and displays similar wonder at the profusion of receptions into which he is pressed. There is a rather amusing passage, thereafter, of how he escaped His Honor the Mayor's fourth subcommittee of deputies and, by the aid of some members of the gendarmerie, came uptown to a house in Fifty-fourth Street where, by appointment, he was to meet with Signor Arimondo and be introduced to those who could best tell him of the sonnets of Sanzio and their present whereabouts. His Excellency describes his meeting with this young couple as partaking of that rush and informality so impressive in America—but then, in the very act of writing, he must have rubbed his bruised elbows; for he goes on to confess himself all in a quandary which even his friend Arimondo, the great bookseller, did not take complete occasion to explain away when he arrived upon the scene. Without apology, intro-



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ductions or other ado they all immediately kidnapped him and carried him on a great wind through the crowds and scream of the whole city. No one had spoken to him. What little they found to say they had said in English. The young man sitting beside him was dark with a constant flush of anger: the young woman often wept.)

"My dear confrere," continues His Excellency's report, "must know that I have been too long in the unselfish service of my country to expect an answer to every query, a reason for every act. Strange as I was to this strange land, I allowed myself to be carried to the very southernmost end of the city, where I was persuaded with scant courtesy to alight before a small shabby shop of curiosities. In the little park which began on the other side of the street the crowd had deserted its seats and dusty lawns along the seawall, and was packed in front of this small shop. There was something about the place which reminded me of the quays at Naples; just beyond it was the Bay, a windy stretch of brown water, busy with every sort of craft, to the blue haze of a large island the name of which I have yet to learn.

"I had little opportunity, however, to see more of these surroundings than the comforting fact

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that the *Extravaganza* had taken up its moorings in this Bay. Had I had a rocket at hand I fear I should have signaled it then and there. For our small party, coming out of Signor Arimondo's automobile, plunged through the crowd and entered what might once have been a shop, but now was melancholy carnage.

"On the floor, in a litter of broken glass and scattered goods, lay a little man of moribund pallor and convulsing features. A doctor in white clothes (he, I presume, who had accompanied the ambulance before the door) was working him into rolls of bandage, simultaneously threatening him with immediate deportation to the hospital if he did not remain more quiet. The little man's eyes were feverish, however, and it was only after he had seen us enter that he closed them a few instants and allowed something which he had been clutching in his left hand to fall away, as if in weariness from some long vigil.

"It was to him, first of all, that the young couple, Signor and Signora Reni, ran. The youth knelt and took his fallen hand; the little woman bent down and saluted his forehead. None of them spoke: I could see that the surgeon forbade it—but the wounded one's eyes fluttered open again, and when he smiled up at them I could see



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what manner of hero he was, despite his frail ways and lamentable condition. He seemed to be guiding the youth's hands to the spot where the knife had entered between his ribs, then the two hands fell to his side and to the something which lay there on the floor. They thought I did not see, but many a statesman owes his fame to the corner of his eye.

"Signor Arimondo had called me away to the other side of the shop. There was a group of gendarmerie there, surrounding a pair of sullen criminals. I judged that it was they who had performed such a pretty tune on the ribs of the fallen victim; indeed they had been caught in the avenging act, and made no attempt to deny it. They were evidently of the gamin stock of our own Italy; but, though the woman was of an ordinary, middle-aged dignity, the man had dressed himself up in such a strange assortment of clothes that, at first sight of him, Signor Arimondo could scarcely refrain from laughter. The man, it seems, who goes by the soubriquet of Sancho, and is the proprietor of this half demolished shop, had had the outlandish ambition to impersonate no greater person than me. These amazing clothes, then, from a nearby theatrical costumer's represent the common herd's conception of a Minister of Pub-

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lic Arts! There would be a helpful lesson in that, I suppose, for a shrewder politician.

"Signor Arimondo continued staring silently at this pair of criminals, until he had the assurance of the surgeon that their victim need not necessarily succumb to his wound. He had been carrying some small book next to his heart, it appears, and the knife of the man Sancho had had to go through this before it reached his ribs. The couple expressed themselves as disappointed at so mild an outcome, and kept interrupting their interrogation with frequent attempts to discover what had become of this book which the victim carried.

"Signor Arimondo could not persuade them to recount their story. It was plain, even to me, that they had known him in other days: the great American bookseller seemed queerly affected, despite the gravity of his disposition, at the length to which the man's mustaches have grown, and the general rotundity the woman has attained. He received, with many nods and sighs, a key which the man gave up to him—a key, he confesses, to Signor Arimondo's summer villa. The greatest shock seemed to be the confession of the couple that they had been married for many years; that the woman, in fact, had followed the

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man to America and had been living here in evident fear of discovery by some other suitor during all this time. Although much perturbed, Signor Arimondo did not pursue his questioning to the point of trying to discover who this other suitor was. He merely turned and said to me, in an Italian so excellent that I am convinced he could have learned it nowhere unless in Rome:

"Good! A very pretty ending to my story! I shall henceforth be a better man, a more successful merchant!"

"The gendarmes succeeded, at this point, in extracting from the woman a statement as to the crime and its preceding incidents. In her husband's temporary absence, she related, there came into the shop (which she had, for her own private reasons, been undertaking to mind for the last week or so, although she is the keeper of a highly respectable *pension* in another district of the city) a man whom she recognized as one of her tenants. He demanded of her a certain valuable curiosity which, he swore he knew, was now secreted in her husband's shop. She had laughed at him at first; but he had been too fierce for trifling, and, when she refused to allow him to pass, had swept a glass case from the counter,

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leaped across, pushed her away and commenced a search on his own account.

"She had tried to force him back, but he had gone on excitedly searching, kicking aside the mess of scattered goods and broken glass, thrusting his nose into this and that grimy nook, coming at length to a hidden parcel which he shrieked to seize and thrust beneath his coat. Then back he scrambled across the counter, with the stout wench screaming and pummeling his shoulders; and then, just as he got to the door, there came down to it from the street—the returning husband!

"Between them they dragged him back into the shop, and one of them—they will not say which—let him have the knife. They had expected him to fall immediately and to disgorge the seized treasure; but he kept his feet, with the blade buried hilt-deep towards his heart; and when they ran at him again he had to pluck the weapon out and stand at bay with an open wound, and know that his blood was streaming. Again and again he must have held them off, shouting each time more wildly and weakly to those who passed the door, and brandishing the poignard drunkenly with one hand. The other, they tell me, he kept across his coat, across his heart, clutching in a dainty way to keep whatever he



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had hidden there from the possible smear of his blood.

"All the while she was telling us this story, in her low, lazy accent, Signor Arimondo kept looking the woman in the face. It was an American humor, I presume, which made him turn to me, in the midst of it, and ask me whether I was acquainted with the portrait of 'La Fornarina' in the Pitti. (A fine question, that, to ask a Minister of Public Arts!) Did I think, he continued, that there was the least possible resemblance between that beautiful young donna of Raphael and this prisoner? I tried my most politic best to find one; had to excuse myself for being more a statesman than an artist; and when he saw how I evaded his frank slur upon the masterpiece the bookseller smiled most oddly and explained that it was many, many years ago since last he saw the 'Fornarina'!

"They had now taken the wounded man to the hospital, the young Signor and Signora Reni accompanying his stretcher to the sidewalk and standing there to watch after the ambulance for many minutes. The woman in the hands of the gendarmes, when she saw them leave, commenced to scream after them a fearful gibberish about her name and family history: something about her

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shame, I understood, and the shame and curse of all the Luti. It meant nothing to me.

"Then suddenly we realized that the young Reni were no longer in front of the shop; there was no sign of them through the window, no glimpse of them in the crowd which still pressed there. At that the man Sancho broke from the ring of gendarmes, grasped my arm and yelled insanely:

"*I sonnetti, Eccellenza!* Catch them! They have them!"

"Imagine into what confusion every one, even myself and the dignified Arimondo, were thrown by this announcement! The gendarmes rushed forward to seize their prisoner once more, but as they did so the woman escaped their loosened ring, flung herself across the shop and out into the street.

"The rest of us dashed pell-mell behind her, jamming at the door, stumbling and lunging through the crowd, she in pursuit of the Reni, we in pursuit of her. A mad hunting party we were —a fat, panting, screaming woman followed by blue uniforms, a masquerade of mustaches, a solemn, jogging, millionaire bookseller, and a Minister of Public Arts who tripped and sprawled, caught up again, fell behind and was hopelessly



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lost in the unknown park of a city which, only a few hours before, had brought out committees and brass bands to honor him.

"Disgraced as I was by the hooting of little boys, I could not now afford to slacken my pace or desert the chase to which my ocean trip, my political future and my loyalty to His Majesty conscripted me. Amidst docks and brick arcades, statues, trestles, and a maze of railed grass plots I took my hurried way, lost it, refound it a dozen times. Now I was in the midst of our amazing cavalcade; now I was at the farthest end of the park from it, all its figures small and dim, unbelievable puppets in the darkness which had lately been blowing down the city and out to sea.

"Statesmen have had no need of handsome legs, I believe, since the days of Katherine the Great. I wished now, however, that mine were sturdier. For gradually the search outstripped me, spun into the dusk, and I was alone on the gray sea-wall with the wind and the restless water. Small craft passed impertinently close to the shore, silhouettes with single eyes of red or green, or lights already showing at the mastheads. Benches towards the Bay were all empty, excepting one which, nearest me, showed a young couple under a lamp post.

CHAPTER

"It is not the book, the reading of which
they have broken, but the curse of their pur-
taining. For that is a gift of their master and the curse
comes to the book as well. They say curse there
exists no creature to exorcise, nothing in the whole
light of heaven able to a break."

"I understand what a strange power they had
over the universe. Unfortunately, though it is a mat-
ter of great as well as general—and especially
true to my country people. I used to sit by
Damey when she read me the handsome
volume of Lamia, our great discovered. I clung
to her shoulder, listening hard.

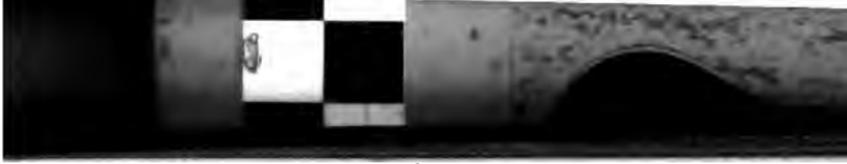
"Look! I heard her say. His blood is on the
crown!"

"Well, said he, how the knife passed through
her. It broke the seal. The string is dangling."

"There is the lamp-light. I saw her pretty face,
and that it wore some tears. 'We should not
have left him,' she protested. 'Perhaps he is
dying . . . we should have waited to know—'

"But the young husband kept crying out to
her, unheeding: 'It is open, open! They broke
the curse of the seal with their own knife. Look!'

"Yet when he tried to spread the leaves apart
and lift them higher into the light for reading,
she grasped his arm, detaining him. 'Not now!



JIMINY

Now, of all times, when a brave friend lies so close to death. . . .

"Yes, now, now! After so long, so much! Now! Let me read, if you will not! Come, let me be! Jiminy!"

"There was a heavy stamping of feet behind me. Then the first of the cavalcade, coming up to discover them, jostled me, thrust me aside. It was the man Sancho, but the wind was in his foolish velvet cloak, and I grasped it and pinned him against the base of the statue. The rest of them were close behind him.

"No, no!" And the little wife struggled for the pages with wild hands.

"The Luti woman shrieked. They turned about and saw us. They jumped up. We burst forward towards them in a mass. The wind roared in behind us, whipped the parchment from their loosened grasps.

"Out, out into the Bay it sailed; into the twilight like a gleaming bird. We stopped short and watched it. All our eyes followed the white, arching wildness of its high, far flight over a ship's gaunt spars against the sunset sky. Then it dipped, dashed down and was lost in the black of the waters.

"We stood there at the sea-wall, looking

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stonily after its swift, utter loss. It was only the Luti woman who could dare break so accursed a spell; and her laughter mounted above every other noise of city, sea and wind-swept stupefaction."

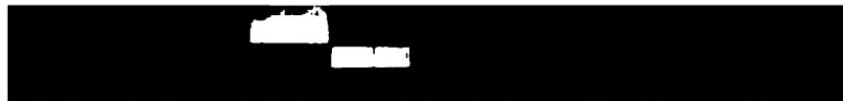
His Excellency ends his polite report with the summary that, after having learned the probability of Mr. Wimple's recovery, the prisoners were confined on no very serious charge; that he himself, having received gracious permission from the proper authorities, will remain in the New York harbor for possibly another week; but that the hope of ever again finding the famous sonnets of which he had so short a glimpse is too slim for encouragement. He begs his dear confrere, the Minister of Foreign Functions, to repeat to His Majesty how impossible it was for him to tame the winds of Fate to the service of the Italian museums; and that, in the event of a new cabinet being promulgated in his absence, it will be remembered with what alacrity he crossed the ocean to find a suitable substitute for the Zeus Sicilanus and the Cellini salt cellar.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I had a little dream,
Sailed out upon the ocean;
Nor where it went nor how it went
I haven't any notion;
Perhaps the waves have taken it
Or winds contrived to blow it:
And should it land on some far strand—
I wonder, shall I know it?

—From the *Little Rhymes*, etc., of
JENNIE RAFTERY RENI.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1

OF it all, no doubt, this is the least believable. The common chords of life are stubborn against blending with a happy note. To-day in Rome, when a few friends foregather to rehearse the tale, they call it the miracle of New York Harbor.

In those brown, oily waters, where refuse floated in the wake of ferry boats, and little tugs towed barges down the aisles of anchored tramps, there was no hint for seven days of aught but hopelessness. Mr. and Mrs. Reni, from the hotel room which they had taken temporarily at short distance from the hospital where Wimple lay, had a torturesome view of two great rivers toiling down to fill the Bay and thrust it further seaward.

JIMINY

They had not dared tell Wimple how irrevocably lost was all their faith, how futile now the pain and danger which had stretched him here. When they came to sit beside his bed they feigned great stories—though their nails dug hard at the palms of their hands—of the indescribable beauty of Raphael's sonnets, and what pleasure they were having from their reading of them, what inspiration. . . . Had to promise that he, too, should some day see and read and be entranced. For when they told him things like these he was calmer, prouder of his life, more patient with the interdict which kept him from the consoling business of his Weenie's Page.

There were still times, no doubt, when Death sought Mr. Wimple out and tried to whisper in his ear the news that in that magic land to come he should be king and marshal over millions of children yet unborn. And there were times when Mr. Wimple, too exhausted for the slightest typing of fingertips along his hospital counterpane, saw a path to heaven lined with shining faces of the young, and heard the pæans they would sing for him, the silver laughter of their welcome.

But there was rest for him, and returning strength, and the joy of his friends, the Reni.

JIMINY

Mr. Arimondo, back in his great bookshop, employed a sentimental noon hour in telephoning the head of the hospital and urging the very best of medical attention for a patient named Wimple.

"Is he—er, a great man?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Arimondo solemnly, "greater than any of our race of clay. He is a prince over superhumans. He is envoy extraordinary from Fairyland, and a hundred thousand souls go journeying beyond the earth each night because he merely writes and tells them to."

So that when the Reni came to visit him that evening they found him transferred to that region of marble halls, grapefruit and pretty nurses known as the Private Ward. They glowed with him over the doctors' latest assurance that he was now drifted safely over the danger line; but he could not understand why, when he in turn whispered of their promise soon to show him Raphael's lovely sonnets, they fell so suddenly silent and awkward, and took a sorry leave.

"The young," he confided drowsily to the nurse who patted his goodnight pillow, "are . . . very young."

And true, the youth of the Reni could not bear so great a burden many further days. This night, as on all nights when Mr. Wimple had been put

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to sleep and the stars still mocked them in the windy sky, they had to seek the Verrazzano statue and sit there, with the black, restless Bay spread out before them. Sometimes there was mist, sometimes the waves quarreled, frothed and washed the sea-wall hurtfully. Then the lights on the boats that passed would dip and swing; then the searchlight which His Majesty's cruiser, *Extravaganza*, had always on the face of its surrounding water (and concerning the activity of which the newspapers of the country, you may remember, asked such martial questions) would retreat into darkness and be reluctantly extinguished.

Each night this white shaft informed the Reni that His Excellency had as yet found nothing; each night, however, it blazoned the persistent hope. Mr. and Mrs. Reni smiled upon it sadly. It was true that parchment was very light of weight; but so, too, was the floating mist which the winds lifted, shredded, blew off and away, no man could tell you whither. The Reni came down to this vast graveyard of the Bay not as ghouls but as mourners.

JIMINY

2

Whenever they found themselves upon a ferry boat they made stout claims of knowing no reason for the escapade: search, they told themselves, would now be vain, incongruous. Yet often they caught each other peering down over the boats' rails, or across the stern gates at the fluff of the turned water, eyes sick with tragedy to find some white speck bobbing there in the lather of the wake.

On the afternoon of the eighth day—a Saturday which filled the ferry boats with crowds for a season's last swim at the beaches—they got upon one of the big municipal craft which ply between the Battery and Staten Island. They had no reason for it, certainly no destination. They had been upon this route two evenings ago: had come and gone, through lines of anchored shadows, to and from the hillside lights of that large isle across the harbor's mouth. It had been a grievous money's worth of shore and water, ships and docks and other islands winking as they passed.

By daylight, now, there was a sparkle on the waves; the tidied sky gave something of its color

JIMINY

to them, too. Immaculate parade grounds on Governor's Island pardoned the stone buildings there for all their grimness. The great copper Lady of Bedloe's wore robes of pistache, and lifted her torch into dazzling sunshine. Battered, briny old freighters flew strange flags and had still stranger sailors at their rails or in the riggings. Tubby white excursion boats crossed their bow with a great dripping churn of paddle wheels, decks waving with crowds, and trailing sudden flings of music in the wind. The incredible towers of lower Manhattan merged behind them into a receding, indistinguishable mountainside of iron, stone and flashing glass.

Then, ahead, the cool hills coming greenly down, startling here and there with autumn's colors. As the island climbed the horizon its outline was shattered into cottage roofs and turrets; below the heights the houses of St. George sloped to a shore line of old, weather-beaten mansions, generously light against their shade trees.

When they had come into the slip, and out upon the sunny viaduct which launched the bolting rest of the passengers towards the trolley tracks, they followed aimlessly the length which led them to the shaded, almost foreign quaintness of the island's streets. They mounted the cobbled

JIMINY

hill ahead, into a region of large boarding houses and small lawns, to where they had a view across the slanting tops of piers, and the bicker of mechanical pianos from a pair of French restaurants. But, as they walked on, each street corner halted them for a glimpse which coasted sharply to the Bay and its grazing tonnage, the gray business of its docks and railroad tracks along the shore.

Then a church made them stand a full five minutes gazing up at the sunlit beauty of its tower, which rose high and slender out of the incongruity of its surrounding cottages. The pinnacle of it thrust a golden cross into the blue sky; the base shot down the hillside with unbroken line, and gave it such simplicity of grandeur that Benjamin Benvenuto was immediately transformed into the artist, the enthusiast, the acolyte.

It was a model, he was sure, of the famous church in Bologna: the one where generations of Reni, in the centuries gone by, had worshiped, and on the inner walls of which, indeed, the frescoes of one of the Reni still glowed to the glory of God. . . . And how beautifully, even in this modern copy, the design of it upheld its prayer of stone against the sky and distant water!

Nothing would do, then, but that they should climb down again to find the base of the tower,

JIMINY

where it met the next street below: a street steeply down and lurching finally to the water's edge. It brought them unexpectedly into an embroilment of trucks and loading cargoes, trains and sweating dock hands.

Between the two piers there was a little cove of shelving green. They fled there, a wall of corrugated iron hiding them on either side, an old willow with forlornly blackened trunk screening them behind. Above its leaves the tower rose; it was the tower alone which could find them out in that poor, gritty sanctuary. In front of them the water was lazy, until the swells from a passing steamer sent it heaving against the grass—and carrying forward, inch by inch, on the small, black crests of its inquietude, a book of parchment, sprawling, soaked and blanched.

3

It came in to them wearily, inertly, as if from a long journey. It touched the shore, stirred a moment in the grass, slipped off into the water and back a little way; then came again with spent devotion to the land, to Jiminy's feet . . . and lay there, in the sunlight, a white, dripping bundle of blank pages.

JIMINY

They were glad it had come to them, even so.

Though they guessed from the first glance the change, the ruin, the meanly total erasure of everything, they were glad. Beloved things do not fly in the winds and float upon the waters, days upon days, and come at length unto their owners' feet, but that a miracle is in the wind and wonderment upon the waters.

Benjamin Benvenuto stooped and lifted it. He held it up to Jiminy with outspread hands, unmindful of how great a drip it loosed between his fingers, or of how cold it lay, how limply on his palms.

"It has crossed the Bay," said he.

She answered him: "Past ships——"

"Searchlights and a thousand other things——"

"To find us!"

"And now——"

"And now?"

But though the seal of it was gone, the string a dangling, silly rot, and any page laid open to their view, they made no move to read it. They had seen enough to know . . . enough to have to face the knowledge and be glad of it.

They were thinking, each of them, of the first, mad days in the early summer mountains; of the moonlight on the porch where they had dreamed

JIMINY

so rapturously of a volume which had in it all of art, of life and love . . . of all the beauties hidden in some misty corner of the earth for those who dared but find, dared read and be the breathing counterparts of Raphael and his donna, Beauteously beloved. They were recalling, each of them, there beside the sudden lane of light which the setting sun threw out across the water, into what stingy commonplaces, base designs, ignoble scraps of mystery and fracas they had come, once they had learned of the reality and nearness of the sonnets.

And had they really read them, these old celebrations of a love long dust, what should they have learned which was not now their secret? They that had hoped, that had lost hope and re-found it in each other's arms, that had worked together, laughed and dreamed together, sacrificed and hidden their sacrifices from each other; they that had drunk bliss, known fear, battled with selfishness, seen blood, shared silences like this one . . . what was there written in the book of any man which they had not already known, already read, recited, to remember until life should end? Beyond life, too, perhaps.

The sun had found the tower; the golden

JIMINY

symbol overhead shone high and brightly. Aye, beyond life, too.

"And now," repeated Benjamin Benvenuto, and waited Jiminy's slow nod.

When she had given it they turned the book over until its cover was uppermost. From the face of it all alien marks were gone; the stain of Wimple's wound, the black curse of the Luti had been drenched wholly out. Nothing remained on that cleansed ground except the faint, blurred traces, scarcely decipherable, "*Sanzio ad—*"

"Ad Reni," completed Jiminy.

"Yes, this," said Benjamin, "to the Reni!"

For, turning the pages one by one, they saw how utterly blank they were, how white they had been washed. As white as the blowing dandelion, as the moon caught belated in a noon-day sky.

"It is only the shell, the torn cocoon," said Jiminy, "of all we dreamed."

From afar, across the water, came the sound of a foreign bugle call: one which Benjamin did not recognize. It was H.M.S. *Extravaganza*, making preparations for its next morning's homeward journey.

They looked at each other and smiled.

"In Italy," said Benjamin, "many will throng to see it under its glass case, and many will won-

JIMINY

der what was written there. But if they are artists they will not find it hard to guess." Then quickly he added: "Or poetesses."

Then Jiminy said: "If they are lovers they will surely know."



POSTSCRIPT

IN that same cable which carried to His Excellency the Minister of Public Arts (now guardian, as you know, of National Funds and Royal Exchequer) the congratulations of His Majesty upon his eminent American success, there was likewise inserted a gracious permission for His Excellency (at his own suggestion) to confer upon one Signor B. B. Reni a two years' scholarship in painting at a renowned Academy in Rome.

Before they left—and even, in fact, before they took advantage of Mr. Arimondo's charming invitation that they pay his bungalow in Nazareth, New Hampshire, a third and autumnal visit—they came to the hospital to tell Mr. Wimple the entire story. He could bear it now, for he was sitting up a portion of each day, and was already fretting for his typewriter.

JIMINY

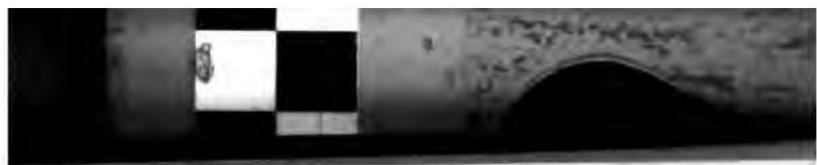
"Dear Marechal," said Jiminy, radiant in her farewells, "why don't you write the romance of the lost sonnets?"

He looked thin and yellow, the poor chap. But he laughed back at her. "A romance. . . . Why, no! Every one in it was married . . . excepting . . ." He could not help the sigh. "But perhaps I can make a sort of . . . of fairytale of it."

And when they were gone, and he was very lonely, he asked his nurse, whom he thought something of a Juno, to fetch him paper and pencil.

"I'll try it," he told her from the meekness of his pillow, "if you'll promise . . . perhaps . . . well, if you won't think it foolish. . . ."







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